Session Title:	2.4 What are the key factors influencing students' decision making?
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Chair:	Becci Williams, Midlands Chair
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Speaker/Institution Bio/Information:	IDP Connect connects universities with a community of highly engaged UK students actively researching their higher education options. Their student-first undergraduate and postgraduate brands empower students with all the information they need to make the right choices for their higher education journey. With one of the largest UK home prospective student datasets of 23m, IDP Connect can provide real-time demand trends which can both enable institutions to apply effective marketing and recruitment strategies and inform the higher education sector on policy recommendations. Their brands include Whatuni? (4.8 million users), Complete University Guide (7.6 million users), Postgraduate Search (2.6 million users) and the Ambassador Platform (2 million chats since launch).
Overview/Aim of session:	HELOA Partner-led session presenting valuable insights into student sentiment from IDP's longitudinal UCAS deadline survey alongside real-time behaviour data drawn from the busiest UG research sites, Whatuni and Complete University Guide.
Workshop Content	Examining the correlation between student sentiment and real-time market demand to reveal the key factors influencing decision making and provide actionable insight to effectively attract and support prospective students through the applicant process. Using real-time data powered by student behaviour on their website, peer-to-peer through student reviews on Whatuni and interactions through The Ambassador Platform TAP and user research.

Case Studies/Examples:	The importance of course portfolio review and how it's important to get it right - many courses which exist now didn't five years ago and there's a change in demand at a fast pace. 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been created yet. Course attractiveness and content go hand in hand with excellent recruitment activity - excellent activity alone not enough. Courses gaining the most traction and interest should assist with the loss for the lesser popular courses. UCAS points - what are they telling us? In recent years, the share of students entering on Medium points increased substantially at the expense of High points. Also, fewer people applying by deadline (-5% which represents 15,000 students). Many universities are frontloading activity at start of cycle when the trend is showing that we should be looking more activities at a later point in the cycle and during Clearing. Subjects - Highest increase in: ● Applied and Pure Sciences - up +0.7% - students applying for STEM subjects, specifically Bio-Medical Sciences. ● +0.6% Law - 16% increase in market share since 2019 ● +0.5% Engineering and Technology Subject risks ● - 0.6% Health and Medicine ● -0.5% Social Studies and Media ● -0.3% Education Sub-discipline demand change: Declining ● Psychology ● Criminology ● Communications/Media ● Medical Tech/Pharma ● Philosophy Increasing ● Building Design/Arch ● Finance ● Business ● Mathematics ● Law (Small % change can represent a few hundred students) Looked at highlights of subject demands by Mission Group and compared that to the increase or decline of the subject area.

Examined regional trends to see where is driving demand, which regions increased/declined in the share of student perspective - London – 1.9% decline in staying in London, Yorkshire/Humber - 0.3% decline.

Examined which regions are attracting most prospective students with destination demand. Highest decline in South East. North West England and West Midlands also seen small decline. Positive - East England and South West seen highest increase so becoming most popular regions. Wales – 8.4% of the market share for interest in attending a Welsh institution.

Peer-to-peer - importance of student reviews, Whatuni host most of them, steady increase so more and more students placing importance on student reviews. Also clear peaks - September and October - these are the moments in the cycle when they really access it and follows this pattern every year. 2023 biggest spike in review searches so more important than ever.
The Ambassador Platform Survey - 85% of students what to hear from their peers. TAP survey showed 58% trust their fellow student opinions most of all. Students don't trust marketing and can spot it much more easily than used to. 88% of students connect with another prospective or current student at some point in their application journey - always been important, but signals that it's more and more important.

Uniselect data - new tool developed for prospective students on Complete University Guide - allows students to input their own preferences about the sort of university they would like and build a personalised league table which most closely matches their preferences. Top priorities when selecting unis - second year in row student satisfaction is number 1, high university ranking not as important even to an audience accessing a league table website. Hearing university's current students are happy is most important.
Biggest change year on year is highly rated teaching (surge on this) and subject rankings slipped from #2 to #4. Marry this will the student reviews and TAP data and it shows that students are placing more and more importance on student opinion.

Autumn 2023 survey - data as of November - 1 in 3 applicants undecided on which unis to apply to. Students leaving it later and later and anecdotally hearing teachers not encouraging applications before Christmas and first year spike in interest was in November not September. But looking at 2025 data more seem to know where they want to go - but limitations to this data, suspect these from more advantaged background and doesn't really include a

	lot of WP students.
	Most concerning costs of going to university and important factors:
	- Accommodation #1, - Day to day costs greater concern than tuition fees. - Most important factor course content still number 1 factor, selected more than twice as often as any other factor. So whilst students have financial concerns, they aren't necessarily driving their decisions.
	What most interested in hearing about from universities - accommodation and student life vital - accommodation mirroring concerns about costs. Picturing yourself at the university is important and hearing about this from students.
	For 2024 applicants – in order of importance:
	- Student Life - Student Accommodation - Details about available courses - Links with industries and businesses - Facilities - Student Support - Scholarships - Part-time jobs - Student Finance - Careers Services - Application Support - Availability of online learning options
Scenarios/Roundtable discussions:	- Use of data within institutions - What access we have to the data and available information, - Varying level of knowledge on how it's being used and how we can use it in a better way. - Size of university impacting access to data and involvement and influencing decision-making on portfolio reviews, not just using data for admissions purposes - Timely data and value of real-time data - Using data within context - Different needs and interpretation of data between marketing staff and recruitment staff - Peer-to-peer reviews - use of blogs, case studies, Unibuddy - Lack of interaction - Tick box exercise of adding software to a website to cover peer-to-peer access.

Questions and Answers:	- Why is there a decrease in Psychology when we are having many conversations with students regarding the course? - Is it possible to access course title data within the list of increasing and declining sub-subjects? - Delegates advised to go to the stand to discuss specific data.
SummaryKey takeaways:	Harness the student voice: - Growing demand for student reviews - More trusted from students as they know what marketing looks like - Appetite for conversation and review content Financial worries: - Utilities, accommodation, tuition fees - How are universities supporting and reassuring applicants Use data to drive success: - Identify real-time trends to support short-term marketing goals. - Use market insight to achieve long-term goals i.e. course portfolio review.