

University of East London

How data is helping its drive to become the UK's leading careers-intensive university

In its ambitious 10-year *Vision 2028* strategy, the University of East London (UEL) set out a clear aim of becoming the leading careers-intensive university in the UK. Along with transforming curriculum, pedagogy, research impact and partnerships, the institution aims to prepare students for the jobs of the future, supporting them to develop the skills, tools and competencies sought by employers and entrepreneurs in a rapidly changing world.

How the use of data is an integral part of the vision

One way in which the university hopes to accomplish this is by developing a portfolio that is well aligned to employer demand for graduate employment in the area. Not only does UEL see this as important in terms of becoming an anchor institution within the community, but it also gives its students – the majority of whom are from the area – a far better chance of gaining employment that utilises the skills they have learned during their degree.

To achieve this aim, UEL recognised the need to get access to good local employment data, and this led to an investment in Emsi's *Analyst* tool – an online Labour Market Insight (LMI) platform, which brings Government datasets and Job Posting Analytics (JPA) data together to give users instant and unparalleled access to key intelligence on jobs, skills and industries in their region. UEL has been using the structural LMI in the tool since 2019, to understand the demand for occupations and industries related to subject areas, and this has then fed into its portfolio development, particularly in terms of assessing the potential for new courses.

How data was used in the crisis

However, when the Covid-19 crisis hit, the labour market entered a period of huge uncertainty, and UEL needed a more up-to-date picture of employer demand in the region. For this, they used the Job Posting Analytics within *Analyst*, which is data harvested from millions of employer job postings, updated on a monthly basis, and which gives a window on the demand for jobs and skills that are being sought by employers in their area.



This data has been used by UEL throughout crisis to get a sense of which industries were being hardest hit, to predict application volume within subject areas, and also to identify some of the emerging skills being brought out by the data. The findings on emerging skills were then incorporated into modules and course titles to re-align them with labour market needs. According to Phil Davey, UEL's Market Insight and Research Manager:

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The last year has obviously been very different from previous years and has thrown up a number of challenges, particularly in terms of understanding the rapid changes to the regional economy. The Job Posting Analytics data has been great to have, as it has allowed us to keep abreast of real time updates and changes in patterns to local employment demand.

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How *Analyst* is being used across the university

Analyst has been designed as a series of intuitive workflows, by which users can quickly get access to occupation, industry and skills data for their local area, in a way that is easy to navigate and simple to extract. The experience of the Market Insight team has been that even those members of the team with little experience of the underlying datasets have been able to get good insights from the tool relating to portfolio development, but also that with better understanding of the tool and the data it contains, especially that relating to higher education, it opens up even more potential, such as being able to answer questions of how particular subject areas relate to various occupations and industries, and what the current demand for these is.

The tool has also been used to meet requests from other parts of the university. For instance, when the Senior Leadership team requested specific data on demand in the region, the Market Insight team was able to provide this very quickly by extracting a report straight from *Analyst*, in the form of a PDF, which they were able to make look professional without much further effort. There have also been requests from academics to look at occupation trends for specific subject areas prior to them starting the forms for a new course, and again these have been really easy to pull off, either as reports from the tool, or walking them through it in a conference call.

Specific uses of the data, now and in the future

In terms of specific ways in which the data has helped UEL, one of the most compelling is its ability to put context and detail around what is known anecdotally. For instance, one of the sectors that has been hit the hardest over the last year has been hospitality. However, it's one thing hearing about this on the news, or even locally, and another thing to be able to put some hard data to the situation. By using the JPA data for the region, UEL were not only able to assess the extent of the effect on demand for hospitality occupations in their area, but this knowledge then helped to create a strategy around the promotion of hospitality to local people, as well as sowing the seeds of some ideas for new courses.

Looking to the future, the Market Insight team is hoping to use the data in a number of areas outside portfolio development and course planning. For instance, one of UEL's main campaigns has been focused on employment outcomes, and the team intends to use the data to inform planning around that. In addition, the institution's Employment team, who work closely with students, has access to the tool and are looking to incorporate the data into their work, whilst the Executive Board and Strategic Planning team are keen to use the employment data to inform and guide their thinking and planning.

As Phil commented:

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*Our Vision 2028 strategy shows we are serious about becoming the leading careers-intensive university in the UK. The data we get from *Analyst* is a key part of this, and it is really helping us to ensure our courses line up with the demand for jobs and skills in our region. This is critical, since it gives us the confidence that we are supplying the skills our region needs, so giving our students the best chance of getting into employment that will utilise the education they've had.*

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