

To: Vice-Chancellors and Principals

By email

CONFIDENTIAL

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Dear Colleague

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Preventing breaches of the examination results embargo

I'm writing to ask for your support in working with UCAS to achieve full compliance with the examination results embargo in 2017 in order to protect students' interests and maintain pre-release access to examination results data.

You may be aware that this summer 13 universities breached the examination results embargo between awarding organisations, UCAS, and higher education providers. Overall, 1,057 students were affected and were able to determine the outcome of their application before they received their results. In a very small number of cases students were able to access their examination results.

Whilst UCAS is confident that none of these embargo breaches was the result of deliberate action, the scale and nature of these incidents reflects poorly on the universities concerned and the higher education sector as a whole. Awarding organisations, in particular, are concerned about UCAS' and providers' ability to maintain the required level of data confidentiality during the results embargo period.

Under the current arrangements, UCAS has contractual agreements with the JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications), SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) and other awarding bodies which provide privileged access to examination results. This enables UCAS to share results with universities and colleges in advance of results days to support the effective operation of admissions. UCAS also asks your institution to sign an annual embargo agreement to provide assurance about the use and confidentiality of results data once they have been released to you.

However, pre-release access to results data is not an entitlement, and awarding organisations have indicated that they will reconsider these arrangements, and potentially withhold or delay the release of results data, unless compliance with the embargo period is improved. This would have serious consequences on the operation and timescales for confirmation and clearing.

UCAS' investigation into the root causes of the breaches has found that these were largely as a consequence of failures to manage and secure processes and settings in technology systems, in particular those which generate automated communications such as customer relationship management and accommodation management systems. Even where providers have robust processes in place, without senior leadership, coordinated risk management, and appropriate readiness checks and assessments, it is evident that breaches can, and do, happen.

UCAS needs your team to work with us to achieve a zero breach outcome in 2017. We will be undertaking a full review of our contractual arrangements with awarding organisations and the agreement with providers, and will be stipulating mandatory training for relevant staff at every university or college which receives embargoed data. The UCAS Board has also agreed that, as part of our strengthened contract with universities and colleges to provide early access to exam results, we will reserve the right to impose financial penalties on institutions that break the embargo.

To help us undertake this review and ensure that we are engaging at the right level, could you please provide us with the name and contact details of the member of your executive team who has the responsibilities appropriate for ensuring compliance across the functions needed to deliver the zero breach target. This information should be sent to the **UCAS embargo project team**: awardingbodylinkage@ucas.ac.uk and any questions should be addressed to Jill Eyes, **UCAS Results Service Delivery Manager**: j.eyes@ucas.ac.uk in the first instance.

I hope that you will join me in giving this issue appropriate priority in order to secure access to pre-release examination results data in the years to come.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Mary Curnock Cook".

Mary Curnock Cook OBE
Chief Executive