

## Key Issues

February 2003

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## Conflicting Priorities?

### The Challenges of Balancing Different Data Requirements

#### Can't get student-module data when you need it?

Identifying some common reasons for the disharmony between programme enrolment and module registration within the HE sector

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#### Of interest to:

System Managers, Heads of University Administration, Academic Staff and Planning Officers in higher education.

#### Causing mistrust in the business systems?

These are not new issues to the administrative community within HE, but are other constituencies aware of the conflicts of interest? We help you to understand the drivers for information and the factors which are changing priorities and exposing long-standing problems.

#### Are these conflicting priorities distorting the business process?

Is the information being gathered in a top-down way? Is this encouraged by system design, information gathering processes or reporting requirements?

#### Troubleshooting Guide for Practitioners

Whether you're the manager of a student registration system or on the receiving end of its data output we offer a simple practical overview of some of the most common problems.

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## Programme Enrolments versus Module Registrations – Issues in Prioritising Data Capture

Are information systems or processes to blame for the conflict of requirements in capturing student-programme data versus student-module data?

Generally within institutions, information requirements for students' academic provision fall into two broad categories – student-programme data and student-module data. The differing demands of various constituencies – managers, academics, other system owners, administrators, students, external agencies – to differing timescales vie for administrative resource. This usually has the net result of inaccurate datasets in both categories at the most critical information-disseminating time, but perhaps most marked is the lack of timely student-module data at the beginning of an academic session.

The understandable concerns in the early aftermath of registration are familiar to many: incorrect class lists, inaccurate timetables, students themselves finding module registrations incomplete or inaccurate. Increasing levels of interoperability between registration systems and other databases requiring student-academic data are highlighting data capture issues that have been around for a number of years, but to new audiences. Deficiencies in initially-produced class lists from administrative systems have long been an academic bugbear. Errors in student-module registration have been known to surface as late in the day as examination board scrutiny. More recent student awareness of timetabling inaccuracies and MLE records of module registration have further consolidated mistrust of core business systems.

But from where does this information dichotomy spring? There are some understandable reasons. Initial data flows into institutions from enquirers and subsequently applicants is very much programme-focussed. Little if any module data is processed or captured at these points by most institutions. A prime reason for this for many institutions is the administrative instability of programme structures from year to year. This is not to suggest that from a quality, marketing and funding perspective the programme content is unstable at a higher level of granularity – but administratively unique module codes reflecting a more detailed level of granularity as to a programme's composition are substituted frequently. Therefore any module coding that could potentially be attached to an applicant requesting at the start of one session to start a programme in the following session will often be virtually useless when the time comes for the successful applicant to register, and for this reason many institutions choose to suppress module attachment functionality in the Admissions area even if it is available within the product.

The programme-driven legacy of admissions leads nicely into the registration process, whereby senior managers require rapidly-produced information on student numbers against academic areas. Understandably, student-programme analysis is used to provide this, despite funding and statistical return methodologies having shifted to account for modular composition of programmes, and so this causes a priority push for the administration to get the students enrolled onto programmes, with module registration becoming a secondary priority by default. This is particularly so as most student registration systems still support and promote the process of enrolling against programmes before registering against modules.

Meanwhile the module-registration-dependant learning and information systems – and importantly, the students and academics - lack the necessary information at a critical stage. So is this a distortion of the true business process requirement if viewed holistically? Certainly one fix that is applied to the problem is to allow direct intervention in maintaining module registrations on the additional systems, rather than addressing the source of the problem on the core registration system. This is at best messy in further muddying the waters as to which system is the source of truth for module registration data, and also further adds to the inefficiency in the business process as well as reinforcing the view of key constituencies that the central records are lacking in value.

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It is when the enrolment 'peaks' have subsided that resource can be more heavily directed at the accuracy of module registrations on the administrative registration system. In particular, drivers for accurate funding and statistical returns, the end of any 'settling down' for students switching optional modules and even preliminary preparations for presentation to examination boards kick in more forcefully at this point. But this is often too late - by this time, now well into the teaching session, confidence in the registration data may have evaporated for students and academics alike.

## Troubleshooting Guide for Practitioners

The following table outlines some of the more common areas of mismatch between system input and report or export output in this area.

Symptom	Consequence	Possible Cause(s)
No module records for student	<p>Student not on class list</p> <p>No module registrations for student on receiving system(s)</p> <p>Mistrust of core registration system(s)</p>	<p>Student has not been enrolled on the expected Programme</p> <p>Programme on which the student has been enrolled does not have expected 'core' module structure<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Student's module option choice has not been processed</p>
Additional module records for student	<p>Additional students on class lists</p> <p>Additional module registrations for student on receiving system(s)</p> <p>Mistrust of core registration system(s)</p>	<p>Programme on which the student has been enrolled does not have expected 'core' module structure<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Student's module option choices have not been updated (previous choices exist)</p> <p>Process flow allows addition of module registration directly to receiving system</p> <p>Student has changed module option choice but the administrator has not been informed</p> <p>Receiving system data feed adds new registrations but doesn't action registrations deleted on business system</p>
Missing module records for student	<p>Student not on class list</p> <p>Module registrations missing for student on receiving system(s)</p> <p>Mistrust of core registration system(s)</p>	<p>Programme on which the student has been enrolled does not have expected 'core' module structure<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Student's module option choice has not been processed</p>

Note: the above guide is generic and consideration needs to be given to your own institution's business and system solution scenarios. In particular;

<sup>1</sup>Assumes a fairly common level of system functionality, i.e. that the business system 'stamps' core unit registrations onto the student's enrolment record from the programme structure represented on the system.

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