## UniForum FAQs

### **What is UniForum?**

The UniForum Professional Service Benchmarking Programme is a well-tested services activity data collection exercise and survey that enables us to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of our professional services against a number of other Russell Group universities.

The programme is led by [Cubane Consulting](https://www.cubaneconsulting.com/) and was originally developed in Australia and New Zealand, where it has been running for 13 years. The UK programme began in 2015 and there’s also a programme now running in Canada.

At Leeds, the project is sponsored by Stewart Ross, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, on behalf of the University Executive Group and is managed by the Strategy and Planning team.

The [University’s Strategy 2020-2030](https://spotlight.leeds.ac.uk/strategy/) emphasises how the University’s intellectual, operational, digital and physical assets will be organised to help us deliver our academic ambition, and to underpin our sustainable societal impact. Maximising the resources that are dedicated to supporting delivery, particularly within the University’s enabling strategy, is critical.

This includes:

* how we resource various professional services activities that underpin our teaching and research work
* how our approach benchmarks against other peer institutions, in particular, other Russell group universities; and
* identifying where there might be a case for new investment in order to make the most of future opportunities.

It also gives us the opportunity to collaborate with some of our peer universities, so we can learn and share best practice in these areas.

Updates on the progress of the programme are made available via [For Staff](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/forstaff/homepage/384/uniforum_service_benchmarking_programme) and from heads of professional services and faculty operations directors and managers and the University’s UniForum Programme Team.

### **Which Russell Group universities are members of UniForum?**

The following universities are also members of the programme: Birmingham, Bristol, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Queen Mary University London and University College London.

### **How long is the programme?**

We first participated in the programme in 2015 and collected on a biannual basis (2015, 2017 and 2019). We were due to collect in 2021 but due to Covid-19, deferred until this year.

### **What does the UniForum Activity Collection involve?**

The primary data from the UniForum Activity Collection covers all administration and support service staff. It identifies how much time is being spent assisting different administration and support activities, as well, as how much resource is contracted in to provide professional services.

The primary data inputs cover:

* all non-academic staff who are on the University payroll, whatever their role or employment arrangements; and
* contracted services and contractors, where the service provider is supporting day-to-day operations that could be provided by in-house staff.

The Staff Collection is undertaken by identified managers and supervisors (known as respondents) to determine how they allocate staff time to a range of activities undertaken during the past 12 months. The collection model includes 163 different activities to which time can be allocated, known as the activity framework, and the smallest allocation of time is 10%, equating to half a day per week or two days per month.

The Supplier Collection is a separate activity, reviewing resource brought into the university via consultants, agencies and other means. This follows a similar process as the Staff Collection, to allocate the provided services to the 163 activities.

Senior managers (primarily heads of professional services and faculty operations directors and managers) across the University are considered to be ‘primary contacts’ and will review the information supplied by the respondents in their area and approve the data collections before submission.

The data is collected using a web-based tool and the processes supporting this are managed by our UniForum Programme Manager in the Strategy and Planning Team.

### **What is the activity data collection period for 2022?**

The data collection period for 2022 was Wednesday 3 August to Friday 2 September and looked at data for the 2021/22 academic year (1 August 2021 to 31 July 2022).

### **What are the UniForum roles?**

There are four key roles in the UniForum programme:

**Primary Contacts:**

Primary Contacts are generally heads of professional services, faculty operations directors/managers and other senior managers.

Their key responsibilities are to provide pre-collection support to the programme manager, to enable the correct set up; pre-collection engagement with respondents in their own areas and to review and approve data submitted by those respondents.

**Staff Respondents:**

Staff respondents are typically managers of business units or supervisors of small teams who have a good understanding of the activities staff in their area perform.

Respondents allocate staff time to UniForum activities (the Activity Framework) for each member of staff listed in their units and provides direct reports information for them. Their specific activities include:

1. Reviewing and confirming staff records that they will provide data for (this can be before or after the collection is launched)
2. The allocation of staff time to activities, using the online tool
3. The number of direct reports for each staff record, using the online tool
4. Submission of the staff data using the online tool
5. Review and confirm supplier data already coded for a specific organisation unit (if requested)
6. Respond to Primary Contact or Function Reviewer queries about the submitted coding

**Supplier Respondents:**

Supplier respondents are category managers in purchasing and facilities directorate managers who review resources that are provided by suppliers, rather than directly employed staff (i.e. consultants, temporary staff etc.). They confirm if supplier activity is in scope and provide activity data for that activity on a quarterly basis through the UniForum collection year, which is then provided to staff respondents for review in August and September. The data provided by supplier respondents includes

1. The allocation of supplier time to specific activities
2. The percentage labour and hourly rate for that activity

**Function Reviewers:**

Function reviewers are typically UEG function leads and heads of professional services who review and validate the data submitted by respondents and approved by primary contacts. This is the last activity undertaken as part of the activity collection before the data is submitted. Function reviewers look at a particular function or activity across the entire institution, rather than just within an organisation unit.

The primary contact and function reviews help to ensure the data is credible and can be used for decision making.

### **I am a Respondent, where can I access training and guidance support?**

A SharePoint site was developed and access given to all respondents, primary contacts and functional reviewers.

For any further support, please contact the UniForum Programme Team.

### **Are there any other tools/strategies for the validation of data to ensure that information is correct?**

We deploy a number of approaches to ensure the data collected, in addition to being complete, is as accurate and representative as possible. We will provide all primary contacts with progress reports at regular intervals during the collection, so that they can review the data being submitted and follow up anything that may need double-checking.

We’re also actively encouraging those professional staff members responsible for completing the data collection (respondents) to consult with colleagues directly if they’re unsure about what activity allocations should be submitted.

All data is also reviewed and validated by primary contacts and function reviewers at the end of the collection process.

### **What is the Service Effectiveness Survey?**

The Service Effectiveness Survey is undertaken to seek feedback from a number of colleagues across the institution (both academic and professional service) regarding some of the key support services at the University: finance, purchasing, human resources, information technology, marketing and student recruitment, research support, student and teaching support and facilities management. The results will help us understand what we are doing well and where we may need to focus more attention across the University.

The survey is not designed to give specific feedback on individuals, but focuses on the overall service delivered in terms of processes, systems and staff interactions. The performance of individuals should not be reflected in the responses and we ask that comments that could identify an individual are not included. Where these are submitted, the comments are anonymised. Additionally, all responses to the survey are confidential and no-one at Leeds will have access to individuals’ feedback.

The Service Effectiveness Survey will be launched on Wednesday 26 October and will run until Wednesday 16 November 2022. Cubane Consulting run the survey on behalf of the University and invitations to participate will be sent from yourviews@uniforum.leeds.ac.uk.

### **What happened with the data that was collected in previous collections?**

UniForum provides one of a number of data sets that have helped inform an evidence-based approach to the planning of professional services that support academic activities at Leeds. Data from previous collections has been used in a variety of ways, including the development of business cases for investments to improve services, such as the Corporate Processes and Systems Programme and the Student Lifecycle Programme.

Individual heads of professional services have also used the data in different ways, including to provide evidence of where headroom could be created within a service by operating more efficiently, and thereby allowing the service to respond to new demands within its existing budget. It has also been used more generally in preparation of Integrated Planning Exercise (IPE) submissions, through which faculties and services set out their priorities and financial plans for the forthcoming five years.

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Although we expect UniForum to help us improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our professional services, the process isn’t being driven primarily by the need to make savings.

### **How has the programme led to administrative efficiencies within other universities that have undertaken it?**

In Australia and New Zealand, where the programme has been running for longer than in the UK, universities chose to join UniForum for a variety of reasons and use the resulting information in different ways, depending on their individual circumstances and objectives.

Some recent outcomes at other universities have included:

* programmes for the continuous improvement of service delivery
* business case support for investment in systems; and
* skills upgrades for service delivery teams.

Please do not hesitate to contact the UniForum Programme Team should you have any other queries in relation to UniForum.