News story: Winners announced for new student apps

Hundreds of thousands of students will benefit from two new digital tools that will help them make the best choice about what and where to study at university, as winners of the £300,000 government competition were unveiled today (19 December).

Universities Minister Chris Skidmore announced the two winning tech companies, who will create mobile apps to level the playing field for all students, by giving them access to graduate outcomes data at their fingertips.

Two contracts worth £150,000 each have been awarded to AccessEd, which offers students a 'personalised careers assistant', and The Profs who will create a game format for players to understand the consequences of their decisions through simulations of graduate career paths.

Last month the Department for Education published landmark research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, showing the vast majority of graduates earn more at 29 than those who did not go to university, but there are cases where students are not receiving the best returns from their course.

The new digital tools are one part of the department's drive to revolutionise student choice, particularly for the most disadvantaged students, who often may not receive help or encouragement on their university choice.

Universities Minister Chris Skidmore said:

> For young people choosing the best university and course for them is a life-changing decision – and we want to make sure they get it right.
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> Going to university can provide a wealth of opportunities and benefits for graduates, but we know that what you study and where you study really matters, so students need to see all of that information to get value for money.
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> These new digital tools will help to give power back to students and transform their choices, so that no matter their background they can choose the right course for them that will help them to succeed in their future careers.

The two contracts have been awarded to the winners of the Open Data Competition, which was launched via Innovate UK's Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) for companies to develop digital tools that allow prospective students to access and compare earnings and employment outcomes from different degrees.

AccessEd is a social enterprise and will develop their ThinkUni app, offering students a 'personalised careers assistant' by bringing together cutting-edge data on universities, courses and financial outcomes in a tailored and accessible way.

The Profs is an award-winning tuition company and will develop its digital tool, The Way Up, offering prospective students the chance to simulate a range of different graduate career paths through an innovative game.

Following the launch of the competition in June in tandem with the Open Data Institute and ODI Leeds, five finalists unveiled their prototypes at a showcase event at Imperial College on 1 November, and tested the digital tools with prospective students. AccessEd and The Profs will launch a public beta for prospective students to start using by the end of March 2019.

Research published by the government in June 2018 showed that what students study and the institution they choose really matters to their future life chances. In many other areas of life, from utility bills to hospital care, technology has put better information at our fingertips.

The competition is part of a wider revolution in transparency in higher education data, with the government already having published a wide range of data on likely earnings, employability, and teaching quality at universities.