

CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY



Using blended data to
identify educational
potential without
personal intrusion

CACI

DO AMAZING
THINGS WITH DATA



Highlights

- Tech-for-good application of profiling data
- Non-intrusive, objective and automated
- Broad educational and employment potential
- Supporting accessibility and equality
- Easy to integrate with agile digital platform

About Zero Gravity

Zero Gravity is a digital platform that connects low-income school students in years 12 and 13 with undergraduate mentors for app-based mentoring into highly selective universities. Every year, the platform supports thousands of state school students into Russell Group and Oxbridge universities. It's made possible by Zero Gravity's proprietary technology, which identifies and incubates the next generation of underrepresented talent



The challenge

Matching social and economic need with opportunities

Founder and award-winning social entrepreneur Joe Seddon explains how Zero Gravity works: “To identify the most high potential students from low-income backgrounds, we’ve built a contextual recruitment algorithm which crunches data about applicants’ socio-economic and educational background. This system draws on simple information in applicants’ profiles, such as their home postcode and secondary school, to draw conclusions about their prior performance and barriers to success.

“Now that London levels of postcode inequality have now become a nationwide phenomenon, our algorithm requires geo-demographic targeting at an increasingly granular level so we can target our services where they’re needed most.”

Identifying the target students is challenging, because they form a diverse group: Zero Gravity supports students in the bottom 40% of the income distribution living across all four corners of the UK. “The data shows that tens of thousands of students struggle to access top universities - it’s not just the bottom 10%.” says Joe. “And we don’t want to label people as ‘low income’ or ‘working class’ - those labels are outdated and stigmatising. Our challenge is therefore to understand what background our applicants are from without asking for intrusive information such as parental tax returns and free school meals eligibility. That approach only serves to create a charity-beneficiary relationship where young people feel like they have to prove their level of disadvantage. We want to celebrate and support ambition, rather than fetishising disadvantage.

“I could see the potential to leverage data in an innovative way to deliver social impact, applying techniques used in the private sector to target consumers and get insights about their behaviour and demography. I knew CACI’s Acorn dataset and tools were market-leading, so I got in touch.”

“



Antonia Antrobus is just one of the students that Zero Gravity has supported in a successful application – she has accepted a confirmed place at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge. Educated at a poorly equipped South London school and living in a small council flat, she credits mentoring with increasing her confidence. **“Before, I felt like my interviews flopped really badly. After mentoring, I was able to bounce off follow-up questions – it felt dynamic.”**

”



The solution

Contextual student profiling from postcodes

Asking applicants to provide their postcode is a very ordinary requirement for registering with any online service today. From that single piece of information, CACI's Acorn dataset provides rich, accurate and up-to-date socio-demographic information, helping to contextualise Zero Gravity applicants. "People expect to give a small amount of identifying data – sharing their home postcode is not a big deal when students are getting so much value for free," says Joe. "Acorn provides just as robust an indication of family income from applicant postcodes as free school meals data, without any intrusion or sense of being patronised."

Joe and the Zero Gravity team used the Acorn dataset to enrich their understanding of the backgrounds of thousands of Zero Gravity applicants. The Acorn data came with clear instructions on how to use it and insights into how other organisations had applied it effectively. "We built it directly into the digital platform – it was a really easy integration," says Joe.

"The Acorn dataset provides the most robust proxy I've seen of students' socio-economic status, making it possible to direct our free-to-use services to those that benefit most. What's more, building the Acorn dataset into our algorithm means our staff don't have to spend thousands of hours analysing student applications, and we never have to request intrusive data from students like parental tax returns."





The benefits

Engaging future generations of ambitious students

Joe is unequivocal about the benefit of employing Acorn data. “The impact was huge. When thousands of secondary students signed up with us last year, we automatically knew which of them were in the greatest need. It was a hugely valuable tool.”

Joe sees wider future applications for the Acorn data in further education and development, which will benefit students, educators and employers alike. “Corporate employers and universities are becoming increasingly interested in spotting the best talent from non-traditional backgrounds and making sure no one falls through the net. Whether it’s targeting students for bursaries, putting a university application in context, or providing targeted mentoring support - Acorn data can be an incredibly powerful resource.”

“It’s about leveraging data to level the playing field in the UK. I believe this will go beyond social impact to allow universities, employers and government to find the most talented people, no matter what social or educational background they come from.”

Zero Gravity has ambitious growth plans and aims to mentor 10,000+ students per year into top universities by 2023, following in the footsteps of more than 1,000 who are now studying at Oxbridge and other top UK universities.





The value of Acorn is exponential because it enables us to identify and engage the right people who then achieve the success that inspires the next generation of applicants. Universities and employers are now beginning to learn from this approach by leveraging data to mobilise their student and employee bases to create huge social impact. Our partnership with CACI is a testament to the benefits of this approach, and I would encourage other organisations to think expansively about how they can utilise data to transform outcomes.

Joe Seddon,
Founder and CEO, Zeno Gravity



To find out more about how CACI can help you support your community, please get in touch:

Stewart Eldridge
Head of Public Sector & University Data



| Call 020 7605 6164

| Email seldridge@caci.co.uk

| Web caci.co.uk

CACI