

## Minutes

AAG/22/M3

Group meeting

Held on, virtually through MS Teams

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Chair: Shoonagh Hubble Brighton Hove & Sussex Sixth Form College (BHASVIC)

Present:

Dan Bishop	South Wilts Grammar School for Girls
David Ruck	Bristol Grammar School
David Stone	Stockport Grammar School
Jim Thewliss	SLS
Jonny Atkinson	HELOA
Liz Allan	James Allen's Girls School London
Laura Stanley	Acland Burghley School
Nikki Foster	Anglo European School
Olivia McLaren	St David's Catholic College
Peter Dunscombe	RGS Guildford
Steve McArdle	Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
Tom Quayley	Winchester College
Rebecca Mahloudji	Ash Green School
Anthony Fitzgerald	Careers Development Institute
Anne Coward	Giggleswick School
Dill Anstey Harris	Federation
George Hull	Coleraine Grammar School
Kenny Anderson	SWAP
Lesley Dunbar	SWAP
Kathryn Parsons	Kenilworth School
Terry Summerfield	Swansea Gower College

Apologies: Luisa Moreno SDA

UCAS in attendance: Laura Hawkins Customer Engagement Coordinator  
Callie Hawkins Lead Product Manager

Presenting: Lynsey Hopkins Head of Operations  
Kim Eccleston Head of Strategy and Reform  
Daniel Brooks Principle Data Scientist  
Pete Edge University of Law

Observing: Courtney Shephard Head of Customer Contact  
Ange James Service Delivery Officer

**A2/22/01 Welcome and apologies**

The Group was welcomed to the meeting and the apologies were noted. The Group introduced themselves.

**A2/22/02 Minutes and action log from previous meeting**

The minutes were approved as a correct and accurate reflection of the last meeting. All minutes passed from previous meetings.

**A2/22/03 Course personalisation algorithm & Provider profiles**

Daniel Brookes delivered a presentation on Course Personalization for the Hub.

The Course personalization tool, aimed at students and in conjunction with advisers, will create a set of suggested courses based on several elements of their UCAS Hub activity, including

- **Student Preferences** (favourite subjects, courses and providers, their career quiz outcome, predicted qualifications, previously studied subjects)
- **Preference recommendations** - subject, careers, course characteristics, qualifications, provider characteristics, attainment, and location

The student then could tweak those suggestions further by rating the importance of each type of preference to them to generate the final combined set of recommendations.

The aim is to help students navigate the different options open to them, both target what they are looking for and open their eyes to what's available to enable students to make informed decisions.

UCAS have completed tests to ensure the recommendations are relevant:

- User Testing – Survey students directly.
- Accuracy Testing – Compare recommendations vs following applications.

The aim is for this to go live in Spring 2023 in time for the 2024 cycle.

The following feedback was captured

- Query on how would UCAS balance the popularity, size and range of colleges/universities to remain fair?
  - Request that advisers have visibility of what students are favouriting, and what they are getting back?
  - Would it be worth filters/flagging for Universities that appear in a certain group e.g. Russell.

It was confirmed universities and colleges would not be able to pay to boost themselves to top of the list.

It was noted smaller providers would not appear as high naturally due to being less 'favourited' by students.

**A2/22/04 C&C –operational update •Adviser portal early opening •C&C stats overview  
•CF decline my place•DBD/RBD update**

Lynsey Hopkins delivered a presentation on Data Cycle Summary.

The 2022 cycle data presented represented day 28 from JCQ results day in August. It was noted that end of cycle data would be available on 8 December.

- Despite the total number of placed applicants being down by 4,900, it was noted that the number of placed 18 year olds was up by 2,900.
- There were 31,900 acceptances for applicants in POLAR Quintile 1, with their entry rate of 24% being the highest on record
- The gap between the application rate for male and female applicants continues to grow.

In response to the query regarding the rise in applicants/less students taking a gap year being consistent with student finance changes, UCAS didn't see any correlation between student finance changes and applicant numbers, unlike in 2012 when the tuition fee increased significantly (£3K to £9K).

**Confirmation and Clearing stats 2022**

The following points were covered:

- although post-covid there were lots of concerns with regards to the smooth running of C&C most notably due to students taking exams for the first time in a couple of years, overall it went very well.
- discussion centred around late BTEC results and it was noted that lessons learned were being reviewed to feed into any required changes.
- UCAS worked with JCQ on opening the Adviser Portal half an hour before the embargo lifted, and recognised the significance of support this provided for advisers and students. Opening an hour before embargo would give even more value and UCAS planned to work with JCQ on this.
- UCAS introduced a queuing system for students accessing their application in the first hour post-embargo on JCQ results day. A timer was introduced which randomly allocated applicants a countdown from 1 second – 10 minutes to cope with demand. This proved effective at managing demand and was largely well received by applicants.

The following feedback was captured:

- the group highlighted the need of an hour access to the adviser portal under embargo on results day
- clear communication on confirmation emails on next steps and whether students need to confirm their place with the university themselves.

- the group highlighted that some students struggle phoning universities and colleges on results days –it’s a big deal for students– need another way to lessen the stress.
- Concerns raised with inappropriate change of course offers, particularly those including foundation courses which would require an additional year of tuition fees.

#### Development and Changes

The dates for Reject By Default (RBD) and Decline By Default (DBD) are remaining as publicised for 2023 entry, as formally communicated earlier with the group. However consultation will be undertaken to review those dates for the 2024 entry cycle.

### **A2/22/05 Adviser developments update•Reason for confirmation pending•Outreach connection service**

Callie Hawkins delivered a presentation on developments for products for teachers and advisers AdAG015

Student Hub and Advisor Portal Integration.

Currently UCAS are developing an integration between the Student Hub and Adviser Portal. When students register for a UCAS account via the Hub, it was confirmed a new consent tick box will be added to allow students to consent to sharing their pre-applicant data and activity with their school or college. The first iteration will allow advisers to see those students who have registered, their preferences and last login details. Future and further iterations were discussed and further enhancements would very much be driven by adviser feedback in terms of priority. The plan is to put this in place after the equal consideration deadline in January. The onus would be driven by students registering and creating a hub account, however, the emphasis for the future improvement would allow advisers to upload their whole cohort via the portal and send out direct links to students to sign up.

Feedback from the group was captured:

- really positive feedback centered around visibility, enabling advisers to support students, active students and last login.
- Future enhancement regarding uploading of cohorts received positive comments as it was more useful to understand students not engaging. In addition, there was discussion on the use of student Unique Learner Number (ULN) and whether this information could be used. Current use was a mixed response; some schools and colleges using ULN within schools/colleges and completed within the UCAS application, some not (notably independent and grammar schools) and . Some members were interested in the benefits and there was potential for those not using could be ‘persuaded’. Callie agreed to take feedback to the business [laura happy for this to go on the action log to update at the next meeting ]

#### UCAS Outreach Connection Service

The group were given an overview and shown wireframes of the Outreach Connection Service, which would enable universities, colleges and charities to upload and manage opportunities specifically for underrepresented and disadvantaged students and to show those to advisers via the Adviser Portal. UCAS would be conducting a pilot to ensure functionality and proof of concept and would like a good representation of schools, colleges and universities and charities.

- Phase 1 – Shared with advisers
- Phase 2 – Research in how the opportunities would be presented to students

The following feedback from the group was captured:

- Very positive endorsement centred around having a dedicated place to find opportunities, saving time on individual research and ability to share with students via Teams, emails and bulletins.
- Requests centred around filters as some opportunities are area specific and future develop student facing - could it use applicant-entered data, such as postcode and POLAR4, to automatically filter opportunities

The Group are encouraged to get in touch with Callie if they want to be part of the pilot.

## **A2/22/06 Reform update •Reference •Gender •Personal Statements**

Kim Eccleston delivered a presentation on Reform.

### **References**

- The streamlined reference process will be introduced for 2024 entry. It was highlighted UCAS worked with a group of providers - with all UK nations, and all provision types such from specialist Colleges through to Cambridge representatives to produce a draft set of questions; these were then refined through engagement with all providers.
- These questions move the references from being varied and incomparable from applicant to applicant, to standardised and covering only the information that providers want to consider.
- It was also noted that updating extenuating circumstances post submission is on the roadmap for future enhancement

### **Predicted Grades**

The issue of predicted grades had been one of the main drivers behind the Department for Education's approach to reform and UCAS are conducting research to address statements made around disadvantaged students being worse off because of predicted grades.

### **Gender options on applications**

For the 2024 cycle, the UCAS application will see Phase 1 of the changes to the gender question. This involves the changing of answers from 'Male' and

'Female' to 'Man', 'Woman', 'Prefer not to say' and 'Identify in other way'. It was noted that UCAS recognised the benefit for inclusion of a question on legal sex, but there were major legal and GDPR challenges. If the application were to include a question on legal sex, there would need to be consideration for capturing third legal sex to align with international applicants. It was noted that future engagements were planned and that they would be advertised in the adviser bulletin.

- **Personal statements**

UCAS have been surveying applicants on their use of the Personal Statement and working with customer groups to test proposed models, including the current version of the Personal Statement. It was noted that this work has helped to develop some possible question to head sections, though there is no consensus on the preferred model. Currently, the focus of the work is to develop the questions that could be part of the initial development of the reformed statement. It was noted that this will likely be a phased project, with future considerations to be made on bespoke question or applicants having multiple statements, and the earliest that it would be introduced would be for the 2025 cycle.

Callie Hawkins is currently working with Kim on producing information and guidance with regards to writing the new three-tier approach reference, and thanked the group for their offer to review.

The following feedback from the group was captured:

In general members of the group felt that with the overall reform on references and personal statements universities and colleges would ask students to complete additional questions, statements and shared concern more universities would follow suit and use an admissions test. Concerns were also noted that additional information would be required from advisers after submission.

#### References

- The option to update extenuating circumstances post submission is important
- Pressure from parents to ensure the reference represents their child
- Huge reduction in workload but realisation of current process not valued.
- Group requested exemplar guidance were required.

#### Personal Statements

- For Personal Statements too many questions make it difficult to complete.
- If each University wants different answers to different questions, then it creates more work for Advisers.

The Group were encouraged to send any questions or comments to [reform@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:reform@ucas.ac.uk).

AdAG016

## A2/22/07 Group update and feedback •Provider Advisory Group update

Pete Edge updated us on the Provider Advisory Group Meeting.

- Institutions are happy to move clashes with RBD and DBD, it may just take a bit of adjustment.
- The Provider Advisory Group continue to look at what the next 2-3 years will look like with UCAS development, particularly in giving students as many options as possible with C&C. Insurance choices or other options are being explored.

### **Any other business and Close**

#### Update on Apprenticeship portal

An integrated journey is being built to help students to consider these alongside undergraduate options. The tools will give guidance to the CV builder, career finder all integrated within the Hub Journey. The PO/LPM will join the next meeting to present an update.

#### Conservatoires

It was confirmed that bringing in the Conservatoires into the Adviser Portal was on the AdAG017 roadmap and considered alongside other priorities. It maybe that it would be worked in through stages potentially, application process may be an overview within the Adviser Portal, with overall management on par with the undergraduate process being the next step.

#### Accommodation

The group fed back concerns about accommodation issues students have experienced, and raised the point that universities should, before accepting students, assess onward accommodation for second and third years and only accept the number of students that the town can fit in.

#### EPQ and Predicted Grades

A member of the group highlighted an issue with a university giving an alternative offer with a slightly lower requirement IF the student has a certain predicted grade for the EPQ. It seems there's an inconsistency with facilities providing a predicted grade for EPQs. UCAS to review its guidance on EPQs to ensure consistency.

A support group has been put together to run past changes.

AdAG018

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 7 February.