Minutes

AG/23/M1
Adviser Advisory Group meeting
Held on virtually through MS Teams

Chair:	Shoonagh Hubble	Brighton Hove & Sussex Sixth Form College
Attendees:	Anthony Fitzgerald	Careers Development Institute
	Anne Coward	Giggleswick School
	Dan Bishop	South Wilts Grammar School for Girls
	Kenny Anderson	SWAP
	David Stone	Stockport Grammar School
	Dill Anstey	Harris Federation
	George Hull	Coleraine Grammar School
	Jim Thewliss	SLS
	Kathryn Parsons	Kenilworth School
	Liz Allan	James Allen's Girls School, London
	Nikki Foster	Anglo European School
	Olivia McLaren	St David's Catholic College
	Peter Dunscombe	RGS Guildford
	Reena Kaur	HELOA
	Steve McArdle	Association of School and College Leaders
	Terry Summerfield	Swansea Gower College
	Rebecca Mahloudji	Ash Green School
TBC:	Tom Quayle	Winchester College
Apologies:	David Ruck	Bristol Grammar School
	Luisa Moreno	SDS
	Laura Stanley	Acland Burghley School
	Elliot Newstead	HELOA
UCAS in attendance:	Callie Hawkins	Lead product Manager (Adviser)
	Samantha Sykes	Customer Success Manager
	Siobhan Williams	Business Engagement Manager
	Sarah Derbyshire	Marketing Manager
	Laura Hawkins	Customer Engagement Coordinator
Presenting:	Samantha Shephard	Team Lead Product Owner
	Kim Eccleston	Head of Strategy and Reform
	Kate Bevan	Product Owner
	Phil Bowell	Senior UK/UI Designer

Adam Solley   Lead UX Designer
Melanie Allford   UX Researcher

Action

A3/20/01   **Welcome and apologies**

The Group was welcomed to the meeting and the apologies were noted. The Group introduced themselves. Samantha Sykes introduced herself as the new co-group owner.

A3/20/02   **Minutes and action log from previous meeting**

The minutes were approved as a correct and accurate reflection of the last meeting.

A3/20/03   **Design Framework**

Adam Solley and Phil Bowell delivered a presentation with and overview of the UCAS Hub including some visual mock ups of what the new designs will look like.

User Interface has been simplified by UCAS to make it more user friendly for applicants. Dark interfaces for night mode will be reflected, as will high contract modes for sight difficulties.

The future design will be changed incrementally during the cycle, rather than one transition. The tools and functionality are staying the same, but the visual representation will be updated . The toolkit 'new look' screenshots and materials will be circulated by UCAS when they are ready – September being a potential timeline.. Advisers would like to be notified when these changes will start to take place.

A 'new look coming soon' placeholder to be set. It was requested by the group that the resources have current and new images so they can see comparison. It was requested to be labelled '2024 entry' rather than just '2024'.

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A3/20/04   **References and I&A**

Kim Ecclestone delivered an update on References and Personal Statements.

Changes implemented by UCAS for 2024 entry cycle.

Free text in References will be structured in questions. Three sections consist of

1. Enter general statement about your school, college/centre (mandatory)
2. Enter any information about extenuating circumstances which may affect this applicant's performance in examinations or other assessments.
3. Use this section to outline any other circumstances specific to the applicant that you think universities/college should be aware of, or how they can support the applicant (optional).

These changes can be viewed on the adviser bulletin sent out to advisers and information in on the UCAS website. Reference exemplars are currently being developed and tested with providers which will be sent to advisers afterwards. [Note exemplars were shared and comments received by members of the group]

The following questions were raised by the group:
- Concerns were raised regarding the 3rd section being utilised as a shorter reference. UCAS will review and if this becomes a major issue a change to word count would be considered.
- Will there be a character count, by section or overall? UCAS confirmed there will be an overall character count of up to 4,000 characters, this will be monitored in the first cycle change.
- Some medical schools are already sending out different forms for students to complete as they say they do not use personal statements and references.
- Oxbridge admissions boxes may be filled with unsolicited references and concern was raised that Cambridge may add a section to their My Cambridge Portal.

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A post submission update function for references feedback has been captured, howeverfor this to be enabled, providers are required to be on one UCAS Link product to allow receipt of that data. Until that transition happens a new 'best practice' piece is being put together for UCAS stakeholders.

Personal Statements
Students expressed personal statements give them a voice during the application. However, the pressure and stress of writing one had been noted and so UCAS have been working on making it a simpler process. The personal statement has been set into sections for applicants. Feedback survey will close at the end of February to start development in March. The survey will be sent as a link to the group.

The following themes were raised by the group:

- Preferred learning style has not been popular amongst advisers and providers as learning styles are different between courses or types of teaching.
- It is questioned whether the extenuating statement should be included in the applicant's section as well as the advisers.
- It was questioned whether students would use an AI tool, it was discussed that as the PS is focused on the content itself not the writing style this would be less of an issue with the new format.

A3/20/05   **Website Developments**

Melanie Allford from UX Research presented how the Information and advice on the Adviser webpages are being reviewed and improved. The key objectives were to improve the navigation, personalise the adviser experience, audit and streamline current adviser content.

The UCAS page for students will show 'discover your future' tool bar. This will help applicants discover a multitude of further education options, rather than just universities – a particular focus on subjects, careers and apprenticeships going forwards.

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Advisers are encouraged to complete the survey to give feedback on the proposed new navigation [note: survey has now closed with recommendations currently underway]

A3/20/06   **Adviser Developments Update**

Andy Frampton presented some questions regarding awarding bodies.

UCAS are looking to provide support for admissions tests. Last year Oxford and Cambridge BMAT or UCAT and admissions testing introduced an early deadline in September.

The group were asked whether they face any challenges registering students for admissions tests and what could improve this, responses received included:

- Several members expressed concern over Cambridge Assessments withdrawing next year

- Student miss deadlines - no visibility for advisers
- Move to an automatic student registration (guess technical constraints)
- Lack of reasonable notice of date change in 2022 was problematic but not the process of signing up
- Several members supported a centralised process with members suggesting via UCAS Students use UCAT and LNET and process works well. How they are used by universities is perhaps a more complex question
- Several members highlighted it is always the most stressful time triple checking we have done all the registrations properly. The process should involve schools/exams team due to staffing, rooming, managing access etc.
- There is an assumption that schools/colleges provide venues and tech for assessments without the guidance we need and solve problems the test system seems to create
- Advisers are relying on goodwill of subject staff to support students for test. Will UCAS have any influence on the nature of tests?
- Timing - exams often fall during half term when the schools are closed, overseas students not being able to go home and the schools had to open just to facilitate them.

Support for online testing eg UCAT
- Notice of additional tests, interviews, timing and expectation of schools needs highlighting to providers

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It was raised that in many centres, Exams Officers tend to complete the entries, so UCAS advisers aren't always in the loop. Feedback has been captured on the Adviser roadmap for advisers to see admissions tests within the portal at the very least.

For any other feedback regarding admissions testing the group are advised to contact Andy Frampton at a.frampton@ucas.ac.uk

Operational Update
Samantha Sykes delivered an operational update that covered End of Cycle data from 2022. Equal COnsdeiration Data for 2023 is released Thursday 9 February. It will be an agenda item at the next meeting.

Operational Developments
End of cycle data was released at the end of 2022. ECD deadline statistics are being released on Thursday 9 February, and will be an agenda item for the next meeting.
The UCAS Hub Live cycle has been published and will be taking place from February through to June – panelists in UCAS' studio attend sessions and they are all recorded. Adviser lives are also being held between February and June. [note all

relevant details can be found www.ucas.com/advisers timeline]

Product Update

It was highlighted that UCAS were currently reviewing the student CF status and the potential use of 'decline my place'. It was confirmed decline my place is currently available from 5 July and used by UF placed students who went to enter Clearing.

The following feedback was noted: .

- Need to look fully at the parameters that can be put in place to show applicants their options to prevent the applicants doing it in error.
- should introduce a check from advisers within this so we can be sure that a student isn't clicking a button in error
- .Some providers are said to keep students in limbo or some providers haven't processed offers at all. With a more competitive HE market, we are emphasising that the CI is the most important decision they will make when selecting their final choices.

It was confirmed that currently there were several stages a student had to progress to ensure they did not release themselves into Clearing in error by using the decline my place functionality. Functionality was specifically designed for student experience as it would be used when potentially adviser support not available during the holidays.
The group are encouraged to contact Emma Cole e.cole@ucas.ac.uk with examples.

Callie Hawkins presented the product update.

UCAS have introduced a new new 'consent' tickbox for students registering for a UCAS account via the Hub. .
Students can tick a box to consent to share their pre-applicant data activity with their schools/colleges/centres.
Those students who forget to share can easily update via their 'preferences' within the Hub. changes to these preferences through their hub.

A 'student hub activity' tile will be introduced within the adviser portal to show a list of students who have registered on the hub, year of entry and last log in as a first step,. Please look out for confirmation via the portal of release and the link to the news article highlighting FAQs.

The following feedback from the group was captured:

- Some members prefer for students to have to click to deny the link
- Group felt the slides shown were useful for them and staff
- Overall group were very supportive of the integration.

The following changes will be introduced for the 2024 cycle:

- National Identity and Dual nationality questions will be removed from the Diversity and Inclusion section..
- Application fee will be £27.50 regardless of choices.
- The gender question will be updated to allow a student to pick from four options: man, woman, I use another term, I prefer not to say.

All paid for reporting (those on the Gold, Silver and Bronze packages) can now be accessed through the adviser portal. Access is permission based, so main contact can give access to other staff (via staff management).

As a one of promotional exercise, there is a free sector progression report available for all centres.

All packages and example reports can be found via the Adviser portal – link here for ease https://www.ucas.com/advisers/managing-applications/upgrade-your-insight-additional-reports

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A3/20/07   **Entry Grades Tool**

Kate Bevan presented an update on entry grades tool. It is being developed in increments and will be tested within the development process, with a plan to evolve and change in response to feedback.

The Entry Grades Report will be located alongside the entry requirements in the search tool. The data will be collated from previous years. A personalisation feature will be available to students to input their grades and qualifications, which display to the user the percentage of applicants with your grades who were accepted onto this course. There will also be a most common grade representation, with a minimum and maximum grade profile.

Regarding disaggregating requirements between private and state school entry grades, UCAS are aware that providers define WP or disadvantaged context differently. UCAS are looking at providing a supporting page to summarise factors

and context with regards to data. Polar as a proxy was test ran but it didn't meet expectations.

A3/20/08	**Group Update and Feedback**

Reference exemplars will be useful.
An update from topics discussed at Provider Adviser Group was delivered

Reject by default (RBD) and DBD
UCAS reminded the group that the RBD/DBD function is there to keep the cycle moving. Active decisions are recommended for the applicant's best interest, and equally the provider's reputation. UCAS have been asked to continue Webinar and forums or use bulletins to express deadlines. The dates will be released soon
Looking ahead UCAS will explore support for providers regarding fees and additional documentation uploads especially with international applicants.

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Apprenticeships overview

AdAG023
ML / LH

A3/20/09

UCAS' goal is to support and link advisers to students on their apprenticeship journey as they do with university choices. The group asked if there is a plan to update the UCAS Parents section to include information about apprenticeship routes. UCAS have just launched a new course on the professional development platform for advisers to support apprenticeships.
An update will be given at the next AAG meeting.

Any other business and Close

A placeholder for the next meeting will be set once the group has agreed a date.
It was agreed across the group to hold an in-person meeting will be held in June.