

Minutes

AAG/23/M2

Advisor Advisory Group meeting

Held on Tuesday 13 June 2023 hybrid at UCAS, Rosehill, Cheltenham and through MS Teams

Chair:	David Ruck	Bristol Grammar School
Deputy Chair:	Kathryn Parsons	Kenilworth School
Attendees:	Anthony Fitzgerald	Careers Development Institute
	Alison Woolley	Wessex Group Careers Network
	Anne Coward	Giggleswick School
	Dan Bishop	South Wilts Grammar School for Girls
	David Stone	Stockport Grammar School
	Dill Anstey	Harris Federation
	Emma Lynch	Leicester College
	Kenny Anderson	SWAP
	Laura Stanley	Acland Burghley School
	Liz Allan	James Allen's Girls School, London
	Nikki Foster	Anglo European School
	Peter Dunscombe	RGS Guildford
	Steve McArdle	Association of School and College Leaders
	Terry Summerfield	Swansea Gower College
	Rebecca Mahloudji	Ash Green School
	Rosie Cooper	NISCA
	Jen Barton	HELOA
	Olivia McLaren	St David's Catholic College
Apologies:	George Hull	Coleraine Grammar School
	Chris Towers	Newcastle College
	Luisa Moreno	SDS
	Jim Thewliss	SLS
	Reena Kaur	HELOA
	Siobhan Williams	Business Engagement Manager
UCAS in attendance:	Laura Hawkins	Customer Engagement Coordinator
Presenting:	Callie Hawkins	Lead product Manager (Adviser)
	Samantha Sykes	Customer Success Manager (B2C)
	Emma Cole	Product Owner
	Andy Frampton	Service Delivery Manager (Results)
	Kim Eccleston	Head of Strategy and Reform
	Kate Bevan	Product Owner
	Rachel Harris	Product Owner
	Matt Wasley-Wood	Team Leader – Lead Product Manager

A2/23/01 Welcome and apologies

The Group was welcomed to the meeting and the apologies were noted.
 Kathryn Parsons was welcomed to the group as Deputy Chair.
 The Group members each introduced themselves.
 New Chair David Ruck reminded members of the Terms of Reference which has been sent to the group offline.

A2/23/02 Minutes and action log from previous meeting

The minutes were approved as a correct and accurate reflection of the last meeting.
 The open actions from the log were discussed:

- *AdAG022* – The RBD and DBD dates have been confirmed for 2024.
 Reject By Default (RBD) – 16th May
 Decline By Default (DBD) – 6th June
 Applications after Equal Consideration Date (ECD):
 RDB - 17th July
 DBD - 24th July.

These dates will be circulated to the group with the minutes and are on [ucas.com](#) which can be viewed here [Deadlines for Accepting University Offers | UCAS](#)

It was noted that the May RBD date falls on GCSE English and Maths exams and Northern Irish AS exams. The group agreed this would impact smaller numbers of applicants. Medical Schools are declining students and making late offers post-exams then messaging with 'reserve lists', and not visible on UCAS. A best practice discussion will be added to next meeting's agenda.

KE / LH
 AdAG025

A2/23/03 Reform

Kim Eccleston delivered a presentation regarding Reform of Personal Statements and References. Slides were shared with the group.

References

The members were invited to answer the following questions, 'How is it going' and 'What else would be helpful?'

- The biggest challenge is the various nuanced guidance from universities. In addition conflicting messages and requirements within the institutions is causing confusion.
- Concerns were raised about the lack of awareness of the timeline and the pressure teachers face; the pressure point being the collation of data and when students actually make their choices. The shorter length of the reference is causing confusion between advisers as there are concerns regarding not giving 'enough'.

- Concerns were raised about potential unfairness between applicants if advisers change the reference length towards different institutions to meet differing requirements.
- Northern Ireland is facing issues with industrial actions and budgets being cut and any new initiative may be challenged by teachers.
- Providers are informing advisers that Extenuating Circumstances doesn't fit within box two of the references. UCAS confirmed advisers should still place them within that section and reminded the group all providers use the information within the reference in different ways.

GM / LH
AdAG026

UCAS are working on a selection of different example references to help with guidance. The group agreed that these would be useful and have been asked to send examples of different references to help UCAS create them.

Personal statements

The delay to Personal Statement reform was a sensible option and welcomed by the group. The group shared the following views:

- Against the idea of introducing a personal 'character' box for students. Examples given; felt contradictory from the refined focus of the reference, too overarching, contextual information may become a list of hobbies rather than personality traits that help their chance of being accepted by the provider. Some members feel the three boxes within the Personal Statement already cover the character of the applicant. Member suggested that the size and layout of three separate boxes feels restrictive, as each section requires a different response depending on the applicant and institution/course they are applying for.
- Important to still write a personal statement.
- Need detailed guidance to go with the suggested three boxes, may not have the same level of detail; should be flexible/could be empty boxes?

GM / LH
AdAG027

UCAS have requested Advisers to share current information & advice that is shared in their institution on Personal Statements. This will be set as an agenda item at the next meeting. HEPs move together, so a discussion on how to get advisers involved at the first stage who are representative of the provider sector will be brought to the Admissions Development Group.

The group are encouraged to send k.eccleston@ucas.ac.uk with feedback on the changes to Personal Statements before the next meeting.

GM / KE
AdAG028

A2/23/04 Operational Update

Samantha Sykes provided an Operational Update to the group. Slides were shared. Figures on sector applicant comparisons over the years are available on UCAS.com dashboard.

The question was raised regarding changing the name of Clearing. It was discussed that it didn't have a positive connotation especially with the perception of parents. It was concluded there was difficulty over what it would be changed to.

UCAS confirmed the adviser portal now enabled advisers to view if applicants had been placed at their firm or insurance choice to improve analysis for advisers.

Podcasts go live for students and parents on 5 July 2023.

Advisers Lives Upcoming Dates

Preparing for Results Day – 6 July 2023 at 16:00.

Ask the experts - 16 August 2023 at 16:00.

GM
AdAG029

The group have been asked to share their internal processes for preparing students for Confirmation and Clearing. groupsandforums@ucas.ac.uk

A2/23/05 Adviser Portal and Outreach Service

Callie Hawkins opened the discussion on the recent changes that have been made on the Adviser Portal and invited the group to give feedback.

Feedback on Adviser Portal

- The group agreed the plagiarism alert flag and entry exam filter will be helpful. However, Chat-GPT and other AI tools was raised as a growing concern.
- Could admissions tests go directly to exam officers who deal with entries.
- Could admissions tests and interview or audition be clearly separated.
- It was noted that entry exams pre-submission may be needed but not post-submission.
- More information detail would be useful on the application.
- Flags for applicants favouriting certain courses was welcomed by the group.
- The group agreed the direct link to every course when an adviser needs to view an entry requirement would be extremely helpful.

Outreach Connection Service

The launch date plan is after the 16 October 2023.

It was noted that opportunities are being pushed out for female students, or individuals who identify as females.

Advisers find it hard to pass on all new information to applicants, so it being available to students soon will be beneficial. The ability to select multiple criteria for different opportunities would also be useful.

A2/23/06 Apprenticeship Update including Career Finder Demo

Matt Wasley-Wood took the group through a demo of the Career Finder on UCAS.com. The goal of the tool is to create a search view and apply, end to end journey for applicants. MWW shared different features and target release dates.

Feedback from the group

- Applicants like to see all options that are available to them.
- Advisers have found it valuable to be able to present UCAS as a research tool for applicants who don't want to study an undergraduate degree at university, a really positive step.
- It would be useful for entry requirements on Department of Education (DfE) and University websites that deliver Apprenticeship degrees.
- A step-by-step application process for Apprenticeships and remote interview skills would be welcomed by advisers and students.

- Entry requirements, DfE vs universities some disparity, students don't quite understand.
- Next challenge in apprenticeship – some way for them to have a five/six step progress and resources to help students.

A2/23/07 Entry Grade Tool

Genia Garrity and Rachel Harris delivered an Entry Grade Tool demo. Slides and screenshots were shared with the group.

Feedback from the group

- An interim option alongside displaying qualifications for certain grades, in Tariff points to enable students to calculate an equivalent would be useful.
- There were concerns raised for applicants gaining false impression of chances of being accepted onto a course due to information being provided.
- When grades entered are too low, the group suggested that a message should flag up for students to inform them, rather than the tool showing nothing.

The launch date caused concerns for the group, there was a consensus within the group that waiting until after Equal Consideration Deadline would be beneficial. Otherwise, when an applicant applies early in September, they will not have access to the same tool as students who apply after the deadline in October. This could raise questions around fairness.

A2/23/08 Qualifications, Document Uploads and Fees

Emma Cole invited the group to give feedback on UCAS' upcoming developments.

Feedback on Document Uploads and Fees

- Will there be an option to add more than two nationalities.
- The settled question causes confusion for some international applicants, as students from Hong Kong must be in UK for 5 years to apply for settled status.
- What will be developed to help with Ukrainian refugee's visa status.
- If applicants have a UK citizenship and add a second citizenship, it asks them about settled status statement when that is irrelevant and confusing.
- The question around whether English their first language can be misleading for applicants if they are fluent, but originally from a different country.

Feedback on Document Upload

- Can document upload be available post-application process for international students there is a tight time frame between getting their results and applying for the immigration papers.

Feedback on Extenuating Circumstances

- It was suggested by the group Extenuating Circumstances should be within the 'More about you' section, rather than within the Personal Statement.
- The group unanimously agreed that advisers should have oversight of pupil declared extenuating circumstances, it would be a huge concern if not shared as it would need to have a professional understanding otherwise students would abuse or simply misunderstand. (Suggested consent share data could

wording be added when using the buzzword). A message from providers to students to ease their minds, stating that it won't affect their application in a negative way.

- Would it be possible for extenuating circumstances to be captured later in the cycle, due to potential changes happening within the year between applying and being accepted.
- It was noted that universities also often have forms to declare extenuating circumstances if it has not been able to report to an exam board.
- If advisers can't update extenuating circumstances on UCAS, can UCAS push a 'common approach' with providers so advisers don't have to find specific contacts. Currently it is a time-consuming process. The changes need to be raised with exam boards for them to make any necessary adjustments to grades from GCSE to A-Levels.
- Exam boards are very specific with stipulations when applying extenuating circumstances. E.g. only events that have happened within a short time-frame prior to exams being sat, and does not necessarily allow for longer-term circumstances.
- Advisers being able to inform universities and colleges of extenuating circumstances post submission (via the reference process potentially) would be extremely beneficial.
- Moving to a centralised process would be advantageous.

A2/23/09

Results business workshop

Andy Frampton discussed current issues with Awarding Body Linkage that UCAS encounter, and asked the group the following questions:

- 1) Does the qualification shortlist work from your perspective?
- 2) How up to date is the data you are submitting to Awarding Organisations (AOs)?
- 3) Ideas for improving data quality (either with AOs or on UCAS application)
- 4) If an applicant changes their details at the school, are they encouraged to update their UCAS application?

Questions were not discussed in order and feedback was given across all areas as follows:

- BTEC registration numbers are needed to match students but there are a vast number of options to choose from. ULN supports this, but only 20% of applicants submit it. Advisers confirm many Students don't know what their ULN numbers are.
- Concerns were raised over the BTEC qualification being too vast.
- Would there be a long-term option of a centre uploaded CSV file for institutions to complete? A member felt it was important for students to complete the application themselves, as taking responsibility away down-skilling them.
- Some students have two BTEC numbers but can only enter one. UCAS are aware of this and developing this in the future.
- In Northern Ireland through the Centralised Applications Office (CAO) system, the system is immediate, qualification certificates must be sent with the input of the grades at the time of application.

- There was confusion over the education section with regards to questioning whether Edexcel and Pearson are both accepted still? UCAS are working on this.

A2/23/1

Pearson will be attending schools and colleges as a part of the BTQ application plan. They will be matching students with BTEC qualifications who are in the process of a UCAS application.

Any other business and Close

The group agreed the dates for the next three meetings.

Tuesday 14 November 2023 – online

Tuesday 6 February 2024 – online

Tuesday 11 June 2024 – held in-person, location TBC.