

Minutes

AG/23/M1

Northern Irish Policy Group

Held on Tuesday 25 April hybrid in Lantern Room, Ulster University, Belfast and MS Teams

Meeting scheduled to start at 12:30 – 14:30

Chair:	Roisin McEvoy	Queen's University Belfast
Attendees:	Ronan Cullen Darren Feely Caroline Rogan David Cunningham Alan Scott Mark Lee Jonathan Cockerill Dr Joy Kettle Lisa McMahon Michael Harris	Ulster University Stranmillis University College St Mary's College The Royal School, Armagh Department of Education Department for the Economy (WP and HE in FE) Department of Education Belfast Metropolitan College CCEA Department for the Economy (Apprenticeships)
Apologies:	Donna Finlay Mark Cardwell Stuart Rankin Louise Warde Hunter	CCEA Department of Education South Eastern Regional College Belfast Metropolitan College
Presenting:	Caitlin De Jode	Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager
UCAS in attendance:	Georgia Marks Laura Hawkins	Public Affairs Adviser Customer Engagement Co-Ordinator

A3/20/01 Welcome and apologies

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

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

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

All action log items have been discussed and are closed.

NIPG004 - Speak to analytical teams about the proposed changes to the inclusion and diversity section of the UCAS application form.

UCAS are looking at reforming the question so that it appears only for Northern Irish domiciled applicants. Due to it being an extra development in the application form it pushes the timescale back to the next cycle.

A3/20/03 Chair update

The last Council Meeting took place on 7 March 2023 at Rosehill, Cheltenham. The meeting kicked off with an external speaker Jennifer Kupland, CEO for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. She spoke about UCAS embracing apprenticeship as alternative options for students' choices.

The Northern Irish update included the news of 3 new colleges exploring joining UCAS which was welcomed.

The Admissions Reform exercise reviewed proposed changes to Personal Statements. UCAS gave a Policy update and presented the Journey to a Million and Department of Education essays. The discussion was around the potential impact on the sector regarding applicants increases, and how to deal with the growth.

Clare Marchant, CEO of UCAS gave an update on board 'strategy J' held in 2022 on the six 'discover your future' developments.

The members wanted to raise the following issues for the next Council meeting:

- UCAS Deadlines – the possibility of moving decisions forward to the beginning of May as the deadline for institutions is currently at the end of January.
- The discussion on ECD being bought back to December.

A3/20/04 What does the 'Journey to a Million' mean for Northern Ireland?

Caitlin de Jode delivered a presentation on changes within UCAS since the last meeting. Data was delivered on statistics UCAS saw from applicants in January ECD 2023. It was noted that unplaced applicants had increased due to there not being enough spaces within providers. The increase in demand will raise competition and demand, and this will cause there to be less room for re-applicants. There has been a significant fall in nursing applicants, and a little in teaching. Factors discussed included cost of living crisis and industrial action.

A comparison from 2022 – 2023 January deadline (Northern Ireland) shows less applicants, entry rates, 18-year-old applicants and number of disadvantaged applicants (POLAR). However, since 2020 (last pre-pandemic year of entry) there has been a big increase in all of these categories excluding number of applicants. This is due to the cost of living. Factors include less students attending open days due to travel costs, however students have been shown to accept they will need to work and adapt student life to support funding whilst attending universities.

UCAS/DofE/IfATE Apprenticeship news

Autumn 2023 – Apprenticeships options will be available on ucas.com to view side by side alongside undergraduate opportunities.

Autumn 2024 – Students will be able to apply to Apprenticeships on ucas.com

UCAS' goals include creating commonalities with the apprenticeship application service. The Employers' advisory group are working with stakeholders and announced a partnership with the Department for Education in England, but the vacancies will be UK wide.

Concerns for visibility of supply and demand within the HE provider space were raised by the group. Modelling of offers and outcomes through a number-controlled environment will be affected.

It was noted there will be no limit to the number of apprenticeship applications an applicant can make, and the deadline dates will likely be different to university ones.

The Future of Undergraduate Admissions reports UCAS' reform with references, personal statements, grades on entry, personalisation and widening access and participation. These will be circulated to the group. The group were advised to contact reform@ucas.ac.uk for any further questions.

Journey to a Million projections

The forecast shows a slight decrease in applicants from Wales (-3.9%) and Scotland (-4.4%), a larger increase from England (+26.8%) and slight increase from Northern Ireland (+1.1%). The growth will significantly be present in 18-year-olds and international students. Schools are already seeing students not accepted to all five choices and are likely to see this happening more frequently due to increased competition.

What could disrupt the growth?

- Changes of the pipeline of international students e.g. more Chinese students remaining in China for HE.
- Shift in Policy e.g. a number cap or student funding changes.
- Demand for HE hits a natural ceiling.
- Economic boom period, or buoyant job market leading to a reduced demand for HE from mature students
- Prolonged recession with a worsening job market.

What lessons could Northern Ireland provide to the rest of the sector as a part of the Journey to a Million?

The following questions were raised by the group

- As competition becomes stronger for a limited number of places available the entry requirements may drive up due to higher competition. This would then mean applicants are selected out of a pool rather than through academic merit and potential. This will then influence the widening participation access and achieving a balanced profile may feel more of a challenge for HE Providers.
- There may be an increase in mobility from GB students coming to universities in NI. Many are not considering local FE option in the face of a competitive environment, instead going to GB.
- There is a disjoint between Polar 4 for Northern Ireland and England.
- Performing in exams after rejections are hard for young people, and these deadlines have an effect.
- Queens and Ulster have a the three-campus model and there is a big demand for Belfast campus and higher tariff. Competition for places and being selective especially in nursing and social work courses.

The group discussed the benefits of ECD being pulled closer towards Christmas.

A3/20/05 International Discussion ahead of UCAS Council

Informing UCAS' international strategy.

The group agreed there had been a major increase in international applicants, especially from Nigeria and India.

How could UCAS support the NI sector in realising its international students?

- Help in diversifying ages in Undergraduate and Postgraduate applicants as currently the majority are Postgraduate.
- UCAS to build an Award Body Linkage (ABL) for international qualifications.
- A system that allows providers to accommodate variable start dates that Universities can use.

NIPG007
CDJ

A3/20/06 Campfire – member updates

- The Royal School, Armagh – Waiting to hear back from nursing and social work courses to be able to get offers back before studies commence next week.
- Stranmillis University College - All offers were sent off before easter. Interviews were conducted with admissions teams which allowed them to work on other applications and courses. They are holding an event in June called 'Times and Seasons' for the college of centenary year. The Beyond admissions data futures are coming into replace HESA so this has bought its own challenges.
- Belfast Metropolitan College - interested in Apprenticeships coming onboard. Application process on delivery of Higher level Apprenticeships.
- Belfast UU – Joe Biden came and opened Belfast Campus. Active market and recruitment activity is going on onsite. They are up 18% increase in applications and have tripled in Irish applications. Offers just under 17% in social work and nursing.
- DofE – 3 Colleges are in discussion of joining UCAS. There has been an increase in tuition fees and effects on budgets. NI budget was due to come from NI Secretary of State soon but this wouldn't be able to be announced during purdah. They will ensure to let any providers in the loop.

- St Marys College – They have had a positive increase in number of applicants.

DofEducation Jonny – Qualifications in August with results and what that will be like on the day.

Queens Belfast – There has been an increase in applications, significantly from GB. Although a decrease in nursing from high point at 2020/21. Queens are currently in the process of offer making awaiting confirmation of commission places.

A3/20/07

Any other business and Close

Date of the next meeting is to be confirmed.

NIPG008
GM

The group agreed to share best practice examples in regards to applicants pages.