UCAS

Provider Advisory Group Minutes

PAG/23/M3

Provider Advisory Group meeting

To be held on Thursday 5 October 2023 virtually on Microsoft Teams

Chair:	Claire Pryke	University of Bradford
Attendees:	Ami Kia Solomon	University of Kent
	Amy Smith	Nottingham Trent University
	Alex Mortby	Bedford College Group
	Chris Cockerton	Loughborough College
	Dave Norton	Loughborough University
	Dianne Hammond	University of Law
	Elly Taylor	Royal College of Music
	Frazer Thomas	Bath Spa University
	James Marczak	Myerscough College
	Jude King	University of Liverpool
	Kate Le Cocq	Futureworks
	Lee Rowland	Met Film School
	Liam Bradley	The Northern School of Art
	Luke Gibbons	University of East Anglia
	Muhammad Asin	Birmingham Metropolitan College
	Paul Featonby	Hartpury University
	Rachel Reeds	Anglia Ruskin University
	Rebecca Leech	University of Central Lancaster UCLAN
	Sofia Hepworth	University of Leeds
	Thomas Kidd	University of Gloucestershire
	Victoria Azubuine	University of Bedfordshire
	Vikki Cannon	Royal Veterinary College
Apologies:	Deborah Ryan	University of St Andrews
	Fiona Eccles	The University of Manchester
	Raha Karvar	Birmingham Metropolitan College
	Marie Taylor	University Campus Oldham
	Mark Skippen	Swansea University
	Philip Wilson	College of Esports
UCAS in attendance:	Alison Charles	Customer Success Manager (Provider)
	Laura Hawkins	Customer Engagement Coordinator
Presenting:	Carolyn Mindos	Principal Admissions Reform Lead
	Clare Cozens	Group Product Manager
	Emma Cole	Product Owner
	Gabriela Geeson	Customer Insight Lead

		Action

Genia Garrity — Lead Product Manager
Jenny Garner — Product Owner
Lynsey Hopkins — Head of Operations
Rachel Harris — Product Owner
Samantha Sheppard — Team Lead Product Owner
Silva Carver — Business Readiness and LMS Lead
Vickie Phair — Group Product Manager
Will Beese — Principal Data Scientist

A3/20/01 Welcome and apologies

The Group was welcomed to the meeting and the apologies were noted. It was Claire Pryke's first meeting Chairing the group. UCAS' College and Independent Provider Group have joined the Provider Advisory Group moving forwards, everyone 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.

The open actions from the log were discussed:

- PrAG270 – The group agreed that an update on Level 3 Vocational qualification reform would be most appropriate for the Regional Forums. UCAS will work internally to coordinate this.

- PrAG271 – UCAS have received some survey results regarding whether applicants value in-person over an online interview opportunity and whether the cost of living affected this. There will be feedback provided to the group after the meeting.

Council Meeting Update from Chair
Claire provided an update on items chaired at the Council meeting on 14 September 2023 which included Lifelong learning entitlement and how UCAS will help the admissions side of thi Clare Marchant gave a review on Confirmation and Clearing. There was also discussion regarding cycle dates and reform, which Claire noted would be covered in the Reform agenda item.
There was a survey for members to complete regarding effectiveness of the Council group meetings.

A3/20/03 Operational Update and discussion

Lynsey Hopkins provided the group with an update on data for confirmation and clearing and embargo. A presentation was shared and will be circulated with the minutes.
There will be an embargo workshop for those who breached at the end of November.

The group gave the following feedback on Clearing Plus

- Although some providers experienced fewer clearing plus applicants, they have been of a high quality.
- Some experienced extremely low interest via clearing plus, notably in comparison with previous cycles.
- A College experienced a 12.9k increase in Clearing Plus from last year.
- Members noted that interested applicants had already contacted them via the usual means.
- Many applicants had rung through already and got an offer via another mechanism before providers got to them.

There was positive feedback from members regarding the Reason for Confirmation Pending. A consensus was that it was a success, and for those who used it, reduced the number of enquiries from offer-holders.

The group were keen to understand the use of 'other' as a reason. Andy Frampton confirmed a range of qualifications and non-academic conditions. The reasons will be reviewed, and additional ones included where relevant.

The group also discussed the UCC Change at Confirmation decision. Lack of understanding about process and timings; suitability of the alternatives offered and the challenges it presents for applicants who are unable to accept a UCC decision when the other choice had not yet made a decision.

- It was asked whether UCAS can highlight to the insurance institution what is happening or explain to the applicant. **PrAG273 LH**
- The use of alternative or dual offers was discussed. Some members noted the alternative offer doesn't have enough characters, especially for international students, and it isn't viable to manage numbers if they are tight. **PrAG274 CS**
- A suggestion was made for a 'reason for UCC decision' field to explain why the provider had made an alternative offer, or an automated email to explain what it means and how to accept it. The group supported this. **PrAG275 LH**
- Although UCAS are in communication with applicants, some providers are still facing issues with students using school or college email addresses.

The group have asked for statistics on the following:
1) Decline my place and release into clearing data, and comparison with previous cycle.
2. Activity in Clearing Plus including comparisons with previous cycle
3) How many were accepted in Clearing and then released and went elsewhere.
4) Insight on applicants who release and reapply in clearing or decline in main cycle and then apply during clearing.

A3/20/04 Key Provider Experience Initiatives

Gabriela Geeson ran through the key themes from the Provider Satisfaction Survey to ensure that the right areas for improvement have been identified.

Does this reflect your current needs and priorities for movements?

- Document collection would be extremely helpful as some applicants have to give this information 5 times to different providers. This would also save providers time, as when the Personal ID isn't on the documents sent in, time is spent trying to match to an email. A point was made regarding the importance of vendors integrating, so providers don't have to go onto weblink to view and download on their systems.
- The ability to upload share code would be favoured.
- Fees, residency, and nationality status work was warmly welcomed.
- Student finance integration with UCAS, to then ensure providers know whether the applicant is a home or international student. Some applicants ask providers to make them 'home' otherwise they will go elsewhere.
- For Conservatoires, and higher education providers who require portfolios, self-tapes, and screenplays the collection of media documents such as audio and video files would be game changing. A short-term solution could be a place for applicants to enter a link.
- Greater integration of data collection with statutory bodies (HESA etc.) so providers have common definitions - format etc. would be helpful.
- A course specific document check box for institutions on the collection tool e.g. is a copy of Maths GCSE required.

There are working groups set up within UCAS to focus on these developments and several providers feed into them.

A3/20/05 Reform

Carolyn Mindos presented a Reference update for 2023 and asked the group for input on 2025 Dates and Deadlines Consultation.

The group have been asked to provide examples of references, good and bad, with some explanations.

PrAG276
GM / CM

The group were invited to feedback on the Initial consultation document:
1) Is the January deadline best placed?

- It depends on the profile of applicants received by each institution. For applicants in the FE sector who have undertaken vocational qualifications, the move to the last Wednesday of January has been helpful.
- Having a deadline that falls before Christmas would skew turnaround compatibility statistics.
- Balancing the needs of Access to HE Diploma applicants, an earlier deadline means the reference has little substance, versus a later deadline that puts added pressure on interview-based courses.
- Courses such as Social Work which require an interview don't have enough time. Institutions have been offering direct applications and declining via UCAS. It was said however that the new references will help with that.
- Some providers are happy with where the deadline is in January, as students applying for art and design foundation would have only started in autumn and an earlier deadline could lead to rash decisions.
- The second or third Wednesday in January would allow institutions to process applicants at the start of the month.

- Bringing the ECD earlier serves a critical purpose of focusing (the bulk) of 17–18-year-old applicants even if it is a 'false' deadline for some universities. It would only take one year of a spike in applications on a slightly place limited program for any provider to be thankful that the deadline exists.
- Later in January would be better for postgraduate focused institutions as it gives them more capacity to use resources across time, and for those with an intake every month for different programs.

The question was raised whether these deadlines align with UCAS' widening participation strategy and whether moving the date would benefit them.

2) October Deadline Pilot

A survey will be sent to members after the meeting to give feedback on this.   PrAG277
Carolyn's contact email for further enquiries is c.mindos@ucas.ac.uk   CM / GM

A3/20/06   Product Update:

The group were taken through new product development demos and presentations which will be circulated with the minutes. The group provided feedback:

Entry Grades Tool   PrAG278
- Widening the grades tool to include further BTEC and A level combinations   RH
and other qualifications.
- An aggregated figure for a group of courses at an institution would help for smaller providers.
- There were concerns that the entry grades tool view looks too much like the Course search tool, so there was a worry that there would be an assumption that applicants will get an offer at that level, rather than the published entry requirements.
- The more qualifications a provider adds to their entry requirements the further it will get pushed down the page.
- There were concerns with the tool stating the number baseline of 50 applicants. It was suggested it could say something like "this could be because the course is new, entry requirements have changed or there isn't enough data for us to show".
- Institutions consider far more than grades when offers are sent, so the message stating that other elements of an application should be included.
- From a commercial perspective, smaller providers with less applicants could look unappealing, especially when introducing new courses.
- In cases with individual subjects running with students separately, the data wouldn't be aggregated to meet the minimum threshold.

Course Data
- Graduate data would be skewed for some institutions as it doesn't include freelancers.
- Subjects such as English, History of Media would be hard but Medicine or Social Work would be easier.

App Track sessions
On 1 November 2023 UCAS Tracker Basic will be released as an MVP which will include all the same features as the existing Application Tracker.

The group were positive about the opportunity for daily updates.
A question was asked whether there is a scope to add more data to the basic version?

There are App Track webinars hosted every three weeks which providers can attend.
The next one will be held on Tuesday 31st October prior to the launch.
The group have been encouraged to contact v.phair@ucas.ac.uk if they would like to attend a webinar or find out more.

<u>Admissions Development Update</u>
<u>Document Upload</u>
The group were pleased with the progress made to date and thanked UCAS.
- Institutions would like to verify themselves rather than outsourcing document verification.
- If advisers were accountable for verifying authenticity/suitability of uploaded documents institutions would risk losing what limited verification, they already have (the tick that advisers use to say they've checked qualifications entered).
- It bodes a potential risk of conflict of interest.

The dates of the Fortnightly development webinars can be found in the provider bulletin, or following the link here: https://www.ucas.com/providers/help-and-support/provider-engagements/operational-and-technical-webinars
A briefing document for all providers will be circulated in the next couple of months which will detail all the changes going on for 2025.

<u>Qualifications, Residency Fees, and Nationality</u>
Wireframes will be tested with all applicants, and all help text will be reviewed with an international team. There will be an address look up tool for all 3-year address history.

A member requested that we avoid using contractions and other more sophisticated language in the guidance that non-native speakers might struggle with.

The group are encouraged to contact e.cole@ucas.ac.uk , j.garner@ucas.ac.uk or s.sheppard@ucas.ac.uk with further feedback or questions.

A3/20/07   PDP Survey

Group members agreed that face to face events and workshops on the PDP and 'Discover Days' where institutions were able to see the operation fully would be helpful. UCAS are offering the opportunity for providers to host the training UCAS offer on their own platforms.

PrAG279
AC / SC

The searches on the platform are being improved so providers can easily find what courses they are looking for.

A3/20/08   Conference

Alison Charles provided a summary of feedback from the 2023 UCAS Conference and considerations for 2024.

The group were asked: What should UCAS start doing? What should UCAS continue to do? What should UCAS stop doing?

- The student panel was a highlight for lots of members.
- There isn't anything to help employees from providers progress in their roles e.g., interpreting UCAS data, or how to write an admissions policy.
- There were some concerns with the Conference expanding to all areas.
- Timings being 9-5 felt too rushed and attendees had to miss the last sessions to get home at a reasonable time. Members preferred the midday-to-midday timings from previous years.
- Publishing the dates earlier would be helpful.
- As a networking session it can feel overwhelming walking into a room full of hundreds of people. Could themed sessions for likeminded people be constructed?

Alison Charles asked the group to contact her with further feedback, or if they would be interested in supporting her in a working group to help shape the conference agenda. a.charles@ucas.ac.uk

A3/20/09

Any Other Business and Close

The dates of the 2024 meetings was agreed, and placeholders sent to the group.
Tuesday 27th February – London (location TBC)
Tuesday 4th June - Online
Wednesday 9th October - Online