

Minutes

PAG/23/M1

Provider Advisory Group meeting

Held on virtually through MS Teams Thursday 2 February 2023

Chair:	Pete Edge	University of Law
Attendees:	Dawn Bell Elly Taylor Dave Norton Joanna Labudek-Meakin Kate Rossiter Racheal Decieco Rebecca Leech Fiona Eccles Vikki Cannon Sue Davies Mark Skippen Jude King Ami Kia Solomon Frazer Thomas Claire Pryke Paul Featonby Pete Champion-Spall Luke Gibbons Victoria Azubine	Newcastle University Royal College of Music Loughborough University University of Birmingham Barking and Dagenham College University of Plymouth University of Central Lancaster (UCLAN) The University of Manchester Royal Veterinary College Lancaster University Swansea University University of Liverpool University of Kent Bath Spa University University of Bradford Hartpury University University of Bristol University of East Anglia University of Bedfordshire
Apologies:	Stefan Parker Tracey Stewart	Met Film School University of Aberdeen
UCAS in Attendance:	Samantha Shephard Laura Ratcliffe Genia Garrity Laura Hawkins Ange James	Team Lead Product Owner UK/UI Designer Lead Product Manager Customer Engagement Coordinator Data Steward
Presenting:	Clare Cozens Jenny Garner Emma Cole Lynsey Hopkins	Lead Product Manager Product Owner Product Owner Head of Operations

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.

The open actions from the log were discussed:

UCAS have gone out to several providers who had significant numbers of staff that completed the embargo training with an opportunity to host institutionally branded training on their individual LMS systems. This will enable institutions to have greater control over who is completing the training and how engagement is tracked. If anyone on the group wants to host it on their systems, then they have been advised to speak to Andy Frampton, contactable by a.frampton@ucas.ac.uk

PrAG265

A3/20/03 Chair update

The chair gave an update on recent Admissions Development Group and UCAS Council meetings:

- The Group will be asked to review reference exemplars confidentially in advance of the changes to the 2024 admissions cycle.
- October deadline applications were down.
- UCAS has a growing ambition to manage applications for apprenticeships and higher education.

A3/20/04 Operational Update and Q&A

Lynsey Hopkins delivered a presentation on the 2023 admissions cycle so far.

15 October ECD

It was noted the 51% decrease in 15 October ECD applications submitted on the deadline itself was due to it being a Saturday not a Friday. Possible reasons for decrease in admissions in medicine -

- Applications from China are down for the first time.
- Cost of living is being investigated as an impact
- Decrease in the number of mature students applying
- Looking ahead to C&C

January ECD 2023

The question explored by the group was whether now the ECD has been moved later have applicant's behaviors changed? Feedback from the group was that:

- Applicants seem to be more in need of support this year from advisers who are potentially affected by COVID and have appeared more cautious.
- Monday - Wednesday worked due to last minute assistance required with applications.
- There has been an increase in higher predicted grades being submitted.
- Students are still struggling to get references on time.
- Universities were having to receive references directly after the application was submitted. It was noted to bring forward to Advisers Advisory Group to see if they had the same experience.

It was noted there has been a decline in quality of qualification data entered by students. It was asked whether anything can be done around quality control of data input. UCAS confirmed plans are in place to improve this in the long term and that there are items on the UCAS Development roadmap to tweak the process for independent references informing students that it needs to be completed before submitting the application.

PrAG266

Cost of living has been said to have effected choices – there has been an increase for universities that offer local campus' for applicants to save some money with accommodation. There had also been a decrease in mature student applicants and nursing potentially due to the current publicity around the profession.

PrAG267

Reject by default (RBD) and DBD

It was felt some providers have been intentionally waiting for the RBD to reject the students on the day of big exams which was causing stress. UCAS reminded the group of 'Best Practice' that the RBD is there to keep the cycle moving if an applicant has been stuck on a stage. Active decisions are recommended for the applicant's best interest, and equally the provider's reputation. Some institutions already have strict policy that they must process a decision manually. UCAS have been asked to continue Webinar and forums or use bulletins to express deadlines.

It was asked if customer success directors could arrange calls with institutions prior to deadlines and remind them of the process. If any members have other ideas on how to spread the message they were advised to contact either Lynsey Hopkins – l.hopkins@ucas.ac.uk or Laura Hawkins l.hawkins@ucas.ac.uk.

Embargo dates

Dates for the 2023 embargo were confirmed as:

- SQA Embargo begins 18:00 Monday 31 July and ends 09:00 Tuesday 8 August
- JCQ Embargo begins 14:00 Friday 11 August and ends 08:00 Thursday 17 August.

PrAG268

Last year advisers were allowed early access to the adviser portal on JCQ results day so they could plan support for students. UCAS was considering extending that access to 7am, if confirmed the group will be informed of the decision.

Embargo training for primary correspondents will be released early March with it being checklist and IT readiness focused. The extended module for other users will be available for wider consumption in May.

This year, providers who breach the embargo will be required to submit an executive report to the awarding organisations before the end of August. The group said they would like a longer deadline and to be able to deliver clearing first.

OCR and Pearson are formulating an action plan to prevent missing results for BTEC students. UCAS are meeting to discuss communication strategies ahead of the summer. The number of results received will be shared with the group.

PrAG269

Confirmed 2024 Cycle Dates

- October ECD – Monday 16 October 2023
- January ECD – Wednesday 31 January 2024

UC & UG Rollover

2024 course search officially goes live on Tuesday 2 May. Providers were advised to roll over and update their courses before this date.

ODBC-Link Decommission

No 2024 applicants will be delivered to HE Providers via the ODBC-link. The XML-link will be used going forwards for future cycles and student record systems will need to be updated in advance of the 2024 cycle. If the group has any questions at all they were advised to contact SDMTech@ucas.ac.uk - Adam and his team will offer any help needed.

UCAT

UCAS' Verification Team asked whether there should be an increase with their involvement in dealing with fraudulent UCAT test score reports. The group haven't had much experience in fraudulent applicants, but they agreed it would be beneficial to have in the central system and be informed of any cancelled applications due to fraud.

Discussion Point – What time should Clearing open on JCQ Results Day 2023?

The deadline of 3pm has caused a lot of stress for students. The majority thought the time should be moved forwards to 13:00. Group poll results out of 19 responses

10% - 12:00

78% - 13:00

5% - 14:00

5% - 15:00

RBD and DBD dates for 2024 cycle.

Some members showed concern with bringing the RBD date forward due to interviewing applicants. There were also concerns regarding bringing in another date to the cycle. The consensus was to keep dates where they currently stand.

The future of ABL

UCAS are looking to extend the range of qualifications delivered by ABL. Both GCSE and other Level 2 qualifications have been discussed since the pilot with CEA. The group agreed the following qualifications - GCSEs (especially Maths, English and Science), IELTS (English Language Tests), FETAC from Republic of Ireland.

It was recognised that a lot of applicants are mature so if it only went back 2-3 years it wouldn't be of benefit to them. High levels of fraud had been detected in India Standard XII, Canadian OSSD, and HKDSE so to get them verified would be helpful.

The group were asked whether providers look at amended applications or wait for the applicants to contact them to express a change. Group poll results out of 13 responses

69% - They only review offers if an applicant contacts them to request.

30% - They review any amends that UCAS send and proactively look to change offers.

The group agreed that the message should be re-phrased to 'You can now respond to your offers.'

Coming up

Development Webinar on Wednesday 15 February (and will be scheduled fortnightly moving forwards).

Clearing Webinar on Wednesday 22 February

Admissions Conference on Tuesday 23 – Wednesday 24 May

A3/20/05 Developments update

Jenny Garner and Emma Cole delivered a presentation on changes for C&C with visual representation of how the provider development 'reason for confirmation pending' will look.

It will be integrated into Web-Link and XML-Link. It was noted that if providers are still on ODCB-link, they would have to input reasons via Web-link if they wanted to use the new functionality, but this is not mandatory. It was confirmed that nearly all vendors (with xml-link integrations) are intending to have the reasons for confirmation pending functionality available ready for their customers to use this C&C, there are just a couple of outstanding questions with some of the smaller ones and their timelines.

The update allows providers to specify why a conditional offer can't be converted to an unconditional offer yet. There will be an option of 'other' and a 500-character free text box for any other information. These responses will only be visible to the student for their the firm choice.

Group Poll results out of 17 responses.

'Are you planning to add reasons for pending conformation decision when the new functionality is available?'

68% - Yes

6% - No

25% Maybe-not sure yet

- In 2023 national ID and dual national ID will be removed from Star J* and 2024 it will be removed from the application entirely.
- Additional phone number validations will be added.
- Application fee will be £27.50 regardless of the number of choices.

- CF Decline my place focus groups have taken place. I & A journeys will be brought to webinars. UCAS will be looking into providers being able to press the button and release the applicant into clearing rather than them having to do it themselves.

UCAS were planning for the MCDS data to be made available via UCAS-link. Technical documents will be recirculated to accompany these changes through bulletins, they can also be found on the provider section of ucas.com.

PrAG30

Accessing data via UCAS-link. Are providers starting conversations with vendors?

Group Poll results out of 13 responses.

'Have you had a conversation with your vendor about accessing data via UCAS-Link?'

7% - Yes

15% - No

76% Not yet – but conversation planned

The group were advised to contact mcds@ucas.ac.uk (data team) if they have specific examples of applicants where the data has been missing so they can investigate the issues.

Providers flagged manual delivery of data for providers is problematic due to taking up to two weeks to update and having to flag on the system for consideration, free school meals are mentioned as a particular policy issue. It was noted that applicants are being overlooked for an interview because of the time it takes.

2025 cycle and beyond

The group were asked to vote on which changes they would like UCAS to prioritise for the 2025 cycle and beyond.

Group Poll results out of 18 responses:

0% - Personal statement reform

4% - Automated reply swaps

26% - Document upload

6% - UCAS-link live ASAP

32% - Improved fee/residency data

4% - Replacement for web-link

2% - CF decline my place

6% - Auto offer making/Tariff points calculation

2% - Further enhancements to gender/legal sex questions

13% - Improvements to the qualifications section

2% - Data changes post-submission

0% - Overhaul of ABL and the embargo

Other suggestions from the group included:

- Clearing Plus overhaul (PQA stage) – inform applicants they wish to make an offer to invite to an interview, rather than ringing.
- Course Change Offer – allowing a provider to make more than one offer

The group suggested an increasing number of applicants apply with unverified qualifications. It was raised that some applicants have declined their offer when they are asked to provide certificates. If they are encouraged to upload certificates with application, it could be fairer. Providers want to offer alternative choices to applicants, or multiple other offers rather than being able to only give one option. The applicants could then select from a few options as insurance choices.

Any other business and Close

A3/20/07 Date of the next meeting will be confirmed and a placeholder set for the end of May.

PrAG31

Alison Charles has introduced herself as Group Owner.

The group will be circulated reference exemplars confidentially and are being asked for feedback.

A PAG Teams group is going to be set up for members to respond to immediate updates.