

## Minutes

PAG/23/M2

Provider Advisory Group meeting

Held on Wednesday 7 June 2023 virtually through MS Teams

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Chair:	Pete Edge	Access to Music
Attendees:	Ami Kia Solomon	University of Kent
	Claire Pryke	University of Bradford
	Dave Norton	Loughborough University
	Dawn Bell	Newcastle University
	Elly Taylor	Royal College of Music
	Fiona Eccles	The University of Manchester
	Frazer Thomas	Bath Spa University
	Joanna Labudek-Meakin	University of Birmingham
	Rebecca Leech	UCLAN
	Rachael Decieco	University of Plymouth
	Jude King	University of Liverpool
	Luke Gibbons	University of East Anglia
	Victoria Azubuine	University of Bedfordshire
	Vikki Cannon	Royal Veterinary College
	Tracey Stewart	University of Aberdeen
	Susan Moss	NPTC Group
	Paul Featonby	Hartpury University
	Mark Skippen	Swansea University
	Matt Birkett	Lancaster University
Apologies:	Sue Davies	Lancaster University
UCAS in attendance:	Alison Charles	Customer Success Manager (Provider)
	Laura Hawkins	Customer Engagement Coordinator
Presenting:	Lynsey Hopkins	Head of Operations
	Kim Eccleston	Head of Strategy and Reform
	Ben Jordan	Head of Policy
	Ellie Rowley	Fair Access Programme Lead
	Kate Bevan	Product Owner
	Rachel Harris	Product Owner
	Jenny Garner	Product Owner
	Daniel Pilkington	Senior Content Strategist
	Samantha Sheppard	Team Lead Product Owner

Action

**A2/23/01 Welcome and apologies**

The Group was welcomed to the meeting and no apologies were noted.

**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:

- *PrAG268* – Members agreed that UCAS communications explaining what RBD should and shouldn't be used for has been good.

**A2/23/03 UCAS Council Update**

Pete gave an update on UCAS' recent Council meeting.

The last Council Meeting took place on 7 March 2023 at Rosehill, Cheltenham.

An external speaker Jennifer Kupland, CEO for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education spoke about UCAS embracing apprenticeships as an alternative option for student choice.

The Northern Irish Policy update shared the news of three new colleges exploring joining UCAS which was welcomed.

The Admissions Reform exercise reviewed proposed changes to Personal Statements and References and how to make them accessible for everyone. UCAS gave a Policy update and presented the Journey to a Million and Department for Education essays. The discussion was around the potential impact on the sector regarding applicant 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 development has been piloted with 13 different institutions. The first wave of T-Level students is now in higher education.

**A2/23/04 Operational Update**

Andy Frampton delivered an Operational Update to the group. The presentation was circulated to the group in advance. It was noted the Clearing choice time has been moved from 15:00 to 13:00. The ECD Equal Consideration Date for the 2024 cycle is confirmed for 31<sup>st</sup> January.

Once embargo finishes an email will be sent to applicants, inclusive of SQA. The AC wording for this will be shared with the group to align the content with their own PrAG269 email distribution to applicants.

It was confirmed the email to unplaced applicants will be ready to view by the end of June. It won't include the confirmation pending reason information this year.

The higher predicted grades webinar will take place on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023. Details of webinars and links to view can be found f Information about all future webinars,

and recordings of previous ones can be found at <https://www.ucas.com/provider-engagements>

The group were invited to answer, 'How do you see the shape of the application process going forwards?'

- Providers have been struggling with the limit on characters in the 'Offer Conditions' box. Some of the qualifications are long and additional context are needed for those offers. Could the main (academic) condition and subsequent (non-academic) conditions be included in another box?
- Character limitations for Interviews information is another struggle.
- It would be useful for information in a future meeting regarding Level 3 vocational qualification reform.
- There were concerns raised by the group around 'recruiting' rather than selecting and advice needed on how to offer fair admissions to applicants.
- Contextual information on students such as MCDS data – can this be embedded within UCAS' system, so it is openly accessible for providers.
- Are UCAS looking to do work on impact on on-site interviews due to the cost-of-living crisis, and whether applicants value in-person over an online interview opportunity.
- Closing the loop between UCAS application and student finance so providers know it has been awarded ahead of time to help with fee assessment.
- Developing Document uploads into the application process. Providers stressed the importance of all documents required for international students, and passports for everyone.
- Linking Student Awards Agency Scotland to the funding information would also be extremely useful for Scottish Providers

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## A2/23/05 Development Update

### Entry Grades Tool Demonstration

Rachel Harris and Kate Bevan delivered a demonstration of the new entry grades tool. This is currently in a user testing environment with students. Slides were shared with the group. The HEP environment will be available for providers to run through (did Kate/Rachel confirm when?- if not we should add)

The date for launch is planned for after C&C.

### The following feedback was given by the group

- Does the applicant see a reason as to why the third data point disappears (when you put in PPP)?
- Concerns regarding no reference to subjects were raised. A student can have A\*A\*A\* but if they want to study Maths and haven't taken Maths then they have zero chance of an offer (unless a Foundation of course).
- Predicted grades may not be accurate which will affect the information applicants are given.
- How will new qualifications be added into the tool as they develop?
- Getting universities to test their own data would be useful.
- It would be helpful to have contextual signposting, e.g., 'Universities may have contextual admissions policies...'
- There are occasions where courses go for re-approval and the entry requirements change. The tool needs some help/info text around this.

- UCAS needs to ensure advisors understand the limitations of the data and how smaller providers could be disadvantaged. Training and outreach will be crucial.
- When students are taking specific subjects with non-traditional qualifications the tool won't be applicable for them.

The group's general response was cautious and there were worries regarding some groups of providers and applicants being shortchanged by this initiative. The providers expressed that the tool is only useful for a small number of applicants at this stage.

It was confirmed that 5% outliers in either extreme have been removed from the data and data showed the pandemic didn't make a difference in grade achievements. Additionally, mixed qualification profiles for both BTEC and A-level will be included in the next phase.

Feedback and data will be collated and developed after June - this round of advisory group meetings. The date for the provider Webinar demonstration is Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June. [Provider engagements | Undergraduate | UCAS](#)

Group members are advised to contact Kate [k.bevan@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:k.bevan@ucas.ac.uk) with specific scenarios where the data doesn't reflect what is correct for providers.

#### Recent changes

- This C&C a new 'Reason for delayed confirmation' decision functionality will be displayed to the students.
- The 2024 cycle will show the changes to gender questions
- The application fee will now cost £27.50
- the National ID & Dual National ID questions will be removed.

#### Document upload

New document management allowing PDFs, photos, and word documents to be uploaded is underway. Slides were shared with the group.

A member asked whether evidence of name change would be included as part of ID documents.

#### Extenuating circumstances

The group were invited to answer, 'Outside of the system what would providers consider as an extenuating circumstances?'

- Something traumatic happened to the student at a school.
- Pre-application from previous schools which affected their GCSEs.
- Awarding body changed reasonable adjustments suddenly for applicants.
- A teacher died in class
- Young person was fleeing countries.
- Students were taught an old syllabus.
- Mitigating circumstances shouldn't be included as a part of the application.

Recent developments and reports for UCAS Journey to a Million can be viewed here.

<https://www.ucas.com/journey%20to%20a%20million>

Kim Eccleston delivered a Reform update on references and Personal Statements. Slides were shared with the group.

### References

Section one remains as planned. Section two will be for extenuating circumstances. The third section of the references will be 'supportive information' – a space for advisers and referees to talk about the students and their relation to the subject choice more broadly e.g. work experience. Feedback from students and providers will be taken onboard to streamline and help with transparency.

The group are advised to contact Kim [k.eccleston@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:k.eccleston@ucas.ac.uk) to submit exemplary references of things that aren't demonstrated in the templates.

### Personal Statements

Roadshows and questionnaires took place to ensure the right questions were being asked on the new personal statement model. Feedback from students showed that they felt uncomfortable having questions on credibility e.g. visa sponsorship from a legal perspective. The survey results suggested applicants should be given a chance to talk about their characteristics and personality however these questions alongside the readiness for studies and strength in learning styles will be difficult for students to answer authentically.

The extenuating circumstances section is likely to be taken out of the personal statement and made a part of the application.

### Points discussed by the group

- More information available to applicants on what an insurance choice is for to prevent confusion.
- Providers find the personal statements useful to find out information regarding qualifications being studied, and the need for fee assessments.
- Are there any plans for institutions to be able to say through course collect how providers use the Personal Statements in their assessment processes, to enable applicants to focus their statement on the institutions/course which consider it more?
- Where did conversations get about Personal Statements via different media?

All reference and personal statement changes will be live during the May 2025 cycle for 2026 entry.

### Dates and deadlines

UCAS are looking into the cycle dates and how they help providers. They are reviewing current issues and looking at the possibility of implementing things such as multiple start dates, non-standard start dates for options such as undergraduate, postgraduate, apprenticeships and lifelong learning.

### Outreach connection service

Ellie Rowley delivered an update on UCAS' outreach connection service as a part of the Fair Access Reform project. The service is to help widening participation by

reaching and supporting underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds with their discovery for their future. Slides were shared with the group.

This service is going to be launched in September 2023. The outreach opportunities will be presented to teachers and advisers through the Hub. The long-term goal is to integrate into the Hub for students to be able to view what services are available for them. The pilot in January was positive and some developments have been made within the area outreach (nationwide, post code) location filters.

UCAS will be presenting a roadshow in June and July inclusive of a demonstration and other Fair Access work streams. Once confirmed the dates will be circulated via the bulletin. If members of the group want to be involved or find out more information they are encouraged to contact [e.rowley@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:e.rowley@ucas.ac.uk) or [access@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:access@ucas.ac.uk).

UCAS have been working with 20 pilots from Head of widening participation and access, whilst providing updates on the Fair Access bulletin for providers to sign up.

The link below can be used to get involved.

[Widening participation webform | UCAS](#)

On the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023 a Reform workshop is being delivered.

### **A2/23/07 Expanding UCAS school agent and counsellor network to increase applicant diversity.**

Dan Pilkington opened a discussion on the rise of ChatGPT and AI. Slides were shared with the group.

UCAS plan to send out a draft of what they will be proposing and are welcoming feedback.

The group fed back:

- International applications from agents using aggregators may show them using this tool.
- Students who can access the software may be less likely to use it.
- Some institutions are encouraging students to use Chat-GPT, but in the correct way. Using the technology to help strengthen ability is not the issue.
- Providers would want UCAS to make applicants aware on what the outcome of committing plagiarism would be.

### **A2/23/08 Any other business and Close**

#### **C&C survey**

Providers who have engaged with the C&C survey this year have been far higher. Members are reminded to complete the survey if they haven't already. Three main questions were proposed to the group.

1) Are meeting conversion targets a concern for the providers?

Specific concerns expressed the mature market dropping as well as subjects aligned to health are concerns. Increased offer rates in some areas means some applicants have more choice. Uncertainty of grades, of course. There would have been greater certainty perhaps in achieving higher requirements last couple of years.

2) Do the providers have plans in place to prepare for over-recruitment of international students?

The group shared that they are accommodating for a large number of applicants the best they can. One provider expressed they added a separate cut off for international application deadlines.

**17<sup>th</sup> October has been agreed as a placeholder for the next meeting set to be held in-person.**

Tracey Stewart, Rachael Decieco, Dawn Bell, Joanna Labudek-Meakin and Sue Davies were thanked for their service on the group. The current Chair, Pete Edge is also leaving, and Pete was thanked for his support. UCAS will be calling out for expressions of interest for a new Chair shortly and expressions of interest for new group members will be requested via the Correspondents' bulletin in due course.