

## Minutes

AG/23/M1

Scottish Policy Group

Held on Thursday 4 May 2023 at Wallace High School, Stirling and MS Teams

Meeting scheduled to start at 10:30 – 13:00

Chair:	Forbes Maginnis	Clackmannanshire Council
Attendees:	Alison Train	LEAPS
	Carina MacRitchie	SFC
	Caroline Davies	Fettes College
	Carol Baverstock	University of Aberdeen
	Claire Bannister	Universities Scotland
	Daniel Proudfoot	SFC
	Jim Thewliss	SLS
	Frances Rowan	SQA
	Kirsty Knox	University of Strathclyde
	Helena Ziegler	HELOA
	Martin Gibbons	University of St Andrews
	Sandra Cheyne	SDS
	Shona Barrie	University of Stirling
	Stacey Heather-Brash	SAAS
	Sian McBennett	Grove Academy
	Myles Mackintoosh	Grove Academy
TBC:	Peter Murray	Education Scotland
	Kirsty Conlon	
Apologies:	Karen Frew	Scottish Government
	Margaret Antonson	University of the Highlands and Islands
	Lorna Caldwell	
Presenting:	Carys Willgoss	Principal Policy Adviser
	Holly Brown	Policy Adviser
UCAS in attendance:	Carys Willgoss	Principal Policy Adviser
	Holly Brown	Policy Adviser
	Georgia Marks	Public Affairs Adviser
	Laura Hawkins	Customer Engagement Co-Ordinator

**A1/23/01 Welcome and apologies**

The Group was welcomed to the meeting and the apologies were noted. The Group introduced themselves. This will be Helena Z last meeting as she will be moving onto another room.

**A1/23/02 Minutes and action log from previous meeting**

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

Action log items *SPG004*, *SPG005*, and *SPG006* are all being covered in this meeting and will therefore be closed.

**A1/23/03 Chair update**

The last Council Meeting took place on 7 March 2023 at Rosehill, Cheltenham. The meeting kicked off with an external speaker Jennifer Coupland, CEO for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. She spoke about UCAS embracing apprenticeship as an alternative option 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 increases in applicants, 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:

- Communication around reform and the impact it will have on different institutions and sectors. e.g. the 3 reference sections. Clarification on how to navigate extenuating circumstances, whether they need to be verified medically, and knowledge of what these mean for some students.

**A1/23/04 Feedback for council: Consider UCAS' emerging international strategy at its meeting in June.**

- Some universities are tied together for international efforts. Can marketing that is already in place in Scotland be carried (country specific campaigns).
- Barriers to international students coming to study in the UK aren't university led – other factors play a part such as visas and postgraduates bringing their families in.

- Russell Groups tend to be popular as they are internationally recognised in a students' home country.
- Growth in international markets is exposed to immigration fraud. UCAS need to be aware when verifying international qualifications. Can UCAS outreach to councillors and organisations overseas to raise awareness on this.
- Reply by deadlines (RBD) dates – turn around for all documentation, visas and moving the RBD further back impacts the international students' journey adding stress and difficulty in the process. Scottish Universities starting earlier than the rest of UK makes this particularly significant.

### **A1/23/05 What does the 'Journey to a Million' mean for Scotland?**

Holly Brown and Carys Willgoss 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 is likely to raise competition and demand, and this will cause there to be less room for re-applicants. Factors discussed included cost of living crisis and industrial action.

A comparison from 2022 – 2023 January deadline (Scotland) shows fewer total applicants, 18-year-old entry rates and applicants, and number of disadvantaged applicants (SIMD Q1). However, since 2020 (last pre-pandemic year of entry) there has been a big increase in 18-year-old entry rates and applicants. It was noted that there has been an increase in students choosing to study computer science. Cost of living could be attributed as a factor in the drop in overall numbers between 2022 and 2023. Because of this there are less students attending open days due to travel costs; however, students have been shown to accept they will need to work part-time and adapt to student life to support funding whilst attending university.

#### UCAS/DofE/IfATE Apprenticeship news

Autumn 2023 – Apprenticeships options will be available on [ucas.com](https://ucas.com) to view side by side alongside undergraduate opportunities.

Autumn 2024 – Students will be able to apply to Apprenticeships on [ucas.com](https://ucas.com)

UCAS is working with SDS to explore how we can arrive at a similar objective for Scottish domiciled students, in recognition of their role in Scotland. 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.

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](mailto:reform@ucas.ac.uk) for any further questions.

### Journey to a Million projections

The forecast shows a slight decrease in domiciled 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. With this UCAS forecast a levelling off in the number of EU students (which has been declining since Brexit), and a growth in international students from outside the EU.

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.

CW  
SPG007

Carys Willgoss will share with the group UCAS' report on What influences the choices school leavers make? which explores the impact that school curriculum has on students' post-secondary education choices

Three group members gave feedback on widening participation, promoting full range of choices for applicants, and future student experience.

### Widening participation

Students want to get into universities on their own merit rather than through SIMD 20. It was noted that young carers and estranged people aren't receiving offers in line with their peers for places currently. UCAS need to prepare for retention after application so that students want to stay after the initial intake. One set of guidance won't fit everybody, so a personalised approach is needed. HMC independent schools in Scotland were approached and most use the Gatsby benchmarks and 8 benchmarks of best practise. Institutions are working on providing a stable careers programme, assessing needs of young people, connecting them to careers, meeting employers, and providing experience at the workplace. Exposing students to higher education pathways and widening access is also being developed by working with Scottish bodies, career partnerships with parents and alumni, and promoting apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships.

### Future student experience

The Scottish system's Journey to a Million story is complex as , the government has placed a number cap on student numbers, and on certain subjects. There have been questions over whether it should be lifted, and how an uplift would be financed.

Can Scotland be the only place in the UK where undergraduates don't pay tuition fees?

It was noted that Professor Sir Gerry McCormac's essay will be published in June, which covers the different considerations for the funding of Scottish HE.

**A1/23/06** Full range of choices for applicants

The wider experience of students can be affected at the admissions point which creates challenges. Highers are currently presented as the 'gold standard' of qualifications, but they aren't appropriate for all students. Students may also perform stronger in qualifications which aren't exam heavy. UCAS and admissions teams need to work together to migrate towards the new approach to education. Understanding the differences in life choices and opportunities. 38% of young people in Scotland made it to HE. 4% of those were care experienced 1% made it to third year

**We invite members to explore the resulting 'five big questions' posed by 'Journey to a million'.**

The following points were raised by the group

- Broadening the definition of Widening Participation to include mature adults returning to education.
- When Scottish students are given choices of part-time study, FE or other campus' they go elsewhere in the UK to attend higher education.
- January Equal Consideration Deadline (ECD) being bought backwards was a discussion.
- Competition in Scotland with student caps and caps depending on fee status can cause complication for residency and other circumstances. Also, it can create heightened competition within certain subjects (i.e. teaching and medicine) even before the uplift in 18-year-olds which UCAS is projecting
- Subjects like medicine where the fifth choice has to be different seem ineffective due to the competitive market of all subjects. Students are less likely to be accepted by their fifth option.
- The three options suggestion doesn't provide enough choice for students, five choices should be retained.
- Different pathways beyond HE are not publicised enough.
- Advice and information on the UCAS process and various pathways needs to be available to students earlier.
- Students aren't informed on how to choose their firm and insurance choices best and clearing is misconceived as failure.
- Members expressed it wasn't likely for Scottish universities to be chosen within clearing (a lot of selective universities) and that clearing is more so used for universities outside of Scotland. However, it was noted that the decrease in applicants this cycle may result in more Scottish providers appearing in clearing.
- Should students have to attend University in-person every day or would there be a digital platform for learning to be based to ensure HE is suitable and comfortable for each student (like Open University)?

**A1/23/07** **Campfire – member updates**

**A1/23/08 Any other business and Close**

Members would like the latest communications with advisers around reform to be shared.

SD  
SPG008

The group agreed to set a placeholder for 27<sup>th</sup> September for the next meeting, due to be held in Glasgow.