

Minutes

PrAG/22/M3

Provider Advisory Group meeting

Held on Thursday 13 October 2022, hybrid at UCAS (Rosehill, Cheltenham) and over MS Teams

Chair: Pete Edge University of Law

Attendees – In Person:

Racheal Decieco	University of Plymouth
Paul Featonby	Hartpury University
Joanna Labudek-Meakin	University of Birmingham
Claire Pryke	University of Bradford
Mark Skippen	Swansea University

Attendees – Online:

Victoria Azubuine	University of Bedfordshire
Dawn Bell	Newcastle University
Vikki Cannon	Royal Veterinary College
Sue Davies	Lancaster University
Fiona Eccles	The University of Manchester
Lucy Finnie	University of East Anglia
Jude King	University of Liverpool
Rebecca Leech	UCLAN
James Marczak	University Centre Myerscough
Dave Norton	Loughborough University
Stefan Parker	Met Film School
Ami Kia Solomon	University of Kent
Elly Taylor	Royal College of Music
Maxine Thomas	Pembrokeshire College

Apologies: Dominic Davis City University
Tracey Stewart University of Aberdeen
Frazer Thomas Bath Spa University

UCAS in attendance: Clare Cozens Lead Product Manager
Lynsey Hopkins Head of Operations
Victoria Waterson Service Delivery Coordinator

Presenting: James Austin Lead Product Manager
Kate Bevan Product Owner
Daniel Brookes Principal Data Scientist
Emma Cole Product Owner
Aimee Ellis Product Owner
Jenny Garner Product Owner

Sarah Jones
Daniel Pilkington
Laura Ratcliffe
Lee Standen
Finlay Willicott

Senior UX Researcher
Senior Content Strategist
UX/IU Designer
Product Owner
Marketing Product Lead

Observing: Andy Frampton
Gregory Hodges
Linda Morris
Rebecca Nevin
Joanna Rackstraw
Julia Whittaker

Customer Success Director
Data Collection Support Officer
Service Delivery Partner & Manager
Data Steward
Data Collection Support Officer
Data Collection Support Officer

Action

A3/22/01 Welcome and apologies

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

A3/22/02 Minutes and action log from previous meeting

The minutes were approved as a correct and accurate reflection of the last meeting. It was **AGREED** that the minutes from the last few meetings would be circulated to the group to aid new members.

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It was noted that there were no open actions prior to the meeting.

A3/22/03 Chairs update

The Task and Finish Group (2023 and Beyond) has been renamed to the Admissions Development Group (ADG) which will be looking at reform and what can be achieved by 2025. It was noted that Admissions Development Group was an offshoot and would feed into the Provider Advisory Group (PrAG).

As part of the UCAS Council update, the following reflections were provided:

- The data from the start of the 2023 cycle suggest that it is lower than in previous cycles to date and it would be interesting to see the 15 Oct ECD data to see whether the difference is still apparent
- Whilst there has been no adjustment to the RBD and DBD dates, it is positive that the sector is having these discussions and there is a hope that changes can be made for the 2024 cycle
- The media have been trying to push the narrative that there are larger numbers of unplaced applicants than in previous cycles. It was noted that the Day 28 data published of UCAS does not indicate alarming differences, but it should be recognised that it is likely for increases in unplaced applicants' year-on-year with increased competition and selectivity

A3/22/04 Operational update

Lynsey Hopkins gave a presentation with an UCAS operational update.

The following was raised for further investigation by UCAS as part of the Day 28 data:

- Analysis on the timings in the scheme of applications being submitted by disabled applicants. It was noted that it might be beneficial data for Providers who are considering whether to close courses earlier
- Further segmentation of the data by subject level and type of institution

It was noted that the Day 28 data does not include apprenticeship applicants.

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Confirmation and Clearing (C&C) at UCAS saw a reduction in applicant calls to the Customer Experience Centre which indicates that the improvements to self-serve Information and Guidance is working well, though the length and complexity of the calls that did come through had increased. In contrast, the contact to UCAS through Social Media platforms had increased. The delay between the Embargo lifting and the availability of UCAS Hub, and the timer functionality, was well received by applicants. The email to applicants with information on their confirmation decision had reduced the amount of traffic to the UCAS Hub when it went live.

The Group shared their insights from preparing for the Results Embargo:

- The move to shut down all CRM systems at one Provider has highlighted the number of teams involved and activities taking place over this period. Internal awareness and compliance needs to be extended beyond internal admissions teams
- It was suggested that it would be beneficial for UCAS to run a session provide reminders/prompts on what actions they have completed and/or considered completing. UCAS are already considering the ways that they can facilitate this discussion, perhaps even sessions tailored towards IT and Marketing colleagues at Providers

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It was noted that the unpicking process is a huge improvement on the previous process, with temp or PG admissions-focused staff being more willing to assist UG admissions colleagues. It was also noted that Providers would appreciate earlier information via UCAS about any Awarding Organisations with missing qualifications.

The following cases of best practice and fraud were raised:

- It was flagged that some applicants were seeing decline from their firm institution even though they had met their academic conditions. In these cases, the offer holder had not completed the relevant forms in by the deadline; for one of these applicants, they were given a couple of days turnaround from A Level Results Day. The forms were not explicitly part of the offer conditions. It was recognised that these forms are necessary before enrolment and that sometimes the action or threat of rejection is the only way to get an applicant to engage
- The University of Kent have seen an increase in fraudulent applications sent through UCAS Clearing this cycle. As these applications are coming through UCAS, there is trust that these are not fraudulent, as well as the fact that they must pay an application fee

It was noted that the Annual Provider Update (APU) would be taking place online in December 2022.

A3/22/05 Developments update

Reason for pending confirmation decision

After the delay for the release in the 2022 cycle, the UCAS Product teams have revisited the reason for a delay in confirmation decision functionality. This would be available via weblink and xml-link for both UG and UC offer holders. It was noted that there would now be a dropdown list of reasons for the delay with a free text box alongside for any actions an applicant needs to complete. The user would be able to select multiple reasons from the dropdown list. The function will not be restricted to Embargo periods only, as previously proposed, but would become available as soon as an applicant is in the position. This development was well received by the group. Any questions on this development can be directed to ProviderMDT@ucas.ac.uk.

Gender changes

It was noted that the changes to the gender field would have minimal impact on Providers development-wise and that it was only the options to the question that was changing, with a knock-on change to the reference data. The Group emphasised that for this scenario, and for other similar ones where regulatory returns require additional data, there is a clear expectation that UCAS should be capturing this information wherever possible. It was noted that there

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would be an additional burden on HE Providers with the lack of information on legal sex. UCAS would be reviewing this further for the 2025 cycle and beyond.

Reform References

The UCAS reference would now be separated into three sections for both applicants linked to centres and those applying independently. There will be a character limit on the overall reference and advisers/teachers will not be able to submit unless every section is complete. The sections are combined prior to being sent to Providers so there will be no work required for downstream systems. It was noted that teachers and advisers see this as a positive change with them now be able to provide information on exceptional circumstances for the relevant students.

CF Decline My Place

It was noted that UCAS are aiming on introducing CF 'Decline My Place' functionality for applicants in select scenarios. UCAS will be consulting Groups and Forums to get their views on the proposed work. The Group raised the following:

- There needs to be the inclusion of the issue of forecasting in future consultations
- The Group recognised that there are great positives for applicants in making this functionality available and would reduce contact/workload
- Before releasing, there would need to be considerable work on Information and Guidance (IAG) to ensure that applicants understand the implications. The sector would need to consider a rollback option for any applicants who wish to return to their CF offer
- A move from CF and CI could be a positive for one HE Institution but cause significant problems for another. It was noted that it would be beneficial if each Provider could tailor functionality to their need

RPA

It was noted that the next phase of the RPA improvement project would be the implementation of an RPA API. The aim is to introduce these into test environments before the new year and start to develop the documentation, before working with vendors.

A3/22/06 Reimagining Star J workshop

The following comments were fed back during the workshop:

- Late availability of a Star J report will have an impact on HESES and ILR reporting that usually required at the start of December
- It was noted that different institutions utilise Star J reports in different ways, though Star J did tend to act as the basis for the HESA report
- There was the request that UCAS align the data collection with HESA requirements as much as possible to assist Providers with their HESA returns, though it was noted that some of HESA's questions did not align with UCAS' 'purpose'
- It was **AGREED** that the Group would go away from the meeting and collate information on what information is missing from the Star J file which would in turn inform UCAS about potential changes to the application form that would be required to align the data. This information would be returned to Kate Bevan by email (k.bevan@ucas.ac.uk)

Providers
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A3/22/07 Streamlining fee assessment data capture

It was noted that the assessment of fee status was a complex and resource-heavy task that could be improved by either document upload or centralised fee status decisions, i.e. linking with Student Finance England. The latter solution would allow more time for complex situations, such as pre-settled status versus dual nationality, and the centralisation would avoid offer holders having differing fee status for different institutions. It was **AGREED** that there needs to be improved IAG for students on nationality and ethnicity to clarify in terms of fee status.

A3/22/08 Course personalisation engine

Finlay Willicott and Daniel Brookes gave a presentation on UCAS' current work on a course personalisation engine.

The Provider Profiles were shown to the Group. It was noted that any Marketing colleagues could contact coursesdata@ucas.ac.uk to get a profile set-up for their own institution.

It was raised that it would be beneficial for Providers to check their 'characteristics' as there have been past cases where other companies have categorised based on internet searches. It was also noted that there needs to be flexibility in the algorithm to ensure changes to next cycle or considerations with WP candidates can be incorporated.

A3/22/09 Provider section on ucas.com

The Group were provided an overview of the plans for improvement to ucas.com, including the Provider Hub, which aims to streamline the resources and navigation. It was noted that the UCAS User Experience (UX) team would be emailing Providers shortly to gather feedback. It was also raised that ucas.com users can use the red tab on the right-hand side of the webpage to report any comments, issues, or typos.

A3/22/10 University Accommodation Insights (UniAI) – demo and discussion

James Austin demonstrated the new UniAI tool that is currently under development at UCAS.

The Group raised the following during the discussion:

- The use of the tool will vary from institution to institution and these differing needs of each Provider would ideally need to be incorporated going forward
- It was noted that it would be good to have a clear purpose and understanding of the intentions for the tool before making it available
- Additional features that Providers would find beneficial include whole UG cohort, PG students and families
- It was suggested that this might be a beneficial tool for private accommodation providers in forecasting

A3/22/11 Any other business and Close

Following updates from advisory and policy group chairs at UCAS Council, a member of Council suggested that UCAS bring together group members with an interest in Widening Access/Participation, as this was a common topic of concern and a cross-cutting discussion could help to drive this forward. UCAS would like to take this forward as a pilot, opening an invitation to all group members. Anyone interested in being part of the discussion are asked to email access@ucas.ac.uk.

The next meeting would be held in person on Thursday 3 February 2022, location TBC.