

Minutes

QAG/22/M3

Qualifications Advisory Group meeting

Held on Tuesday 4 October, virtually through MS Teams

Chair:	Amy Smith	Nottingham Trent University
Attendees:	Annie Allitt	Qualification Wales
	Joanna Brown	Milton Keynes College
	Danielle Cartwright	Ofqual
	Martha Charles	University of Huddersfield
	Donna Finley	CCEA
	Bethany Hughes	Ofqual
	Lisa Littlewood	Bournside School and Sixth Form College
	Heidi Page	The University of Manchester
	Andrew Shield	SQA
	Martin Smith	Ulster University
	Amy Starling	Cardiff University
	Michelle Thorne	University of South Wales
Apologies:	Marian Curran	St Brendan's Sixth Form College, Bristol
	Sheila Dunn	SCQF Partnership
	Mike Upton	London Metropolitan University
UCAS in	Jon Brook	Service Delivery Partner (Qualifications)
Attendance:	Victoria Waterson	Service Delivery Co-Ordinator
	Carys Willgoss	Principal Policy Adviser
Observing:	James O'Brien	Data Collections Support Officer

A3/22/01 Welcome and apologies

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

A3/22/02 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:

QAG097 – It was noted that UCAS have been continuing to gather feedback from Higher Education Providers on the Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs). A point had been added to the agenda and would be discussed later in the day, thus, this would remain in progress.

QAG098 – Ben Jordan had updated prior to the session that Widening Participation (WP) applicants was, and would be, considered in all research and insights work. There would be continuing inclusion of WP research in the outputs throughout the cycle, for example, a recent report highlighted that Summer 2022 saw offer rates reduced the least for disadvantaged students. This action would now be closed.

A3/22/03 Confirmation & Clearing (C&C) discussion

The Group were given the opportunity to discuss C&C 2022. It was noted that members had thought that the Summer had gone well. The main difficulty for the sector was the missing information for some candidates taking BTECs and OCR qualifications. The following was raised and would be fed back to the relevant team(s) in UCAS:

- UCAS' response to the issues with missing qualification was positive and members valued the frequent updates on status with results
- It would be beneficial for UCAS to provide information to Higher Education (HE) Providers on any candidates with missing qualifications as part of Award Body Linkage (ABL). It was noted that Pearson and OCR were very responsive when contacted directly about the candidates in question
- There were gaps in the early results sent by UCAS to Providers, however in numerous situations, candidates had already received their results. Candidates were required to send these results directly to Providers as evidence towards their academic conditions of the offer
- The process of retrieving any applicants who have successfully appealed or reviewed their grades was extremely cumbersome and manual. It was noted that it would be beneficial for an electronic process or facilitation by UCAS
- The lateness of the Irish Leaving Certificate (ILC) results caused difficulty, in particular, with oversubscribed or capped courses as it meant that the 'edge cases' could not be reviewed until the ILC results were published
- There were not confidential contacts for every Provider which causes for difficulty during C&C where the majority of contact happens over phone rather than emails during this time
- Edge-case applicants did not understand when they did not meet the conditions, for example the applicant did not achieve an A in a specific subject. It was **AGREED** that there needs to be a review of Information and Guidance on applicants, parents and advisers understanding conditions and clarifying that different Providers have different practices with near misses

JB
QAG105

It was noted that the Group would like an operational update for C&C 2023 at the next meeting, including updates on CF release or reasons for delay on confirmation decision.

JB
QAG106

A3/22/04 Qualifications Information Services discussion

UCAS are continuing to consult the sector on the Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs) portal (<https://qips.ucas.com/>) and have been gathering feedback to bring to the group to help

review the potential options for a replacement to QIPs. The following statements were put to members to determine whether they agreed with the statement:

“There is a lack of trusted sources of international qualifications information”

- It was noted that the group disagreed with the statement as the internal international development colleagues often help admissions staff with setting standards for different regions. Alongside these standards, UK ENIC would be consulted
- There might be a reluctance to start using UCAS as a source of truth for international qualification equivalencies

“UCAS information and UK ENIC information in isolation is often not enough – but combining both resources usually gives the information we need”

- Similar to the first statement, UCAS would not be consulted as a primary source of truth and there is a reliance on internal international staff and their expertise
- It was highlighted that there were differing approaches to international qualification with some institutions setting higher conditions than the equivalencies and it would be important to continue with this discretion for more nuanced offer making

“There is a need for UCAS to provide qualifications information written for HE admissions staff, because materials written by the Awarding Bodies (qualification specifications) are not aimed at a HE audience and don’t give the right information”

- The group agreed with the statement
- It was noted that Providers would find it useful to understand common issues with qualification and a breakdown on the mode assessment, for example the percentage of written exams versus coursework

“We do not require UCAS to provide qualification information on Level 2 qualifications”

- The group agreed with the caveat that UCAS would signpost to relevant information such as the Ofqual Register

“Admissions staff often feel frustrated as they do not have resources to demonstrate to faculty staff how a non-standard qualification is equivalent to a more familiar one”

- There was agreement with statement in terms of certain qualifications, often technical/vocational qualifications like BTECs or T Levels
- It was noted that UCAS would need the appropriate information from Awarding Bodies if they were to create resources to help Admissions Staff with demonstrating equivalency to faculty staff
- There was the recognition that Senior Leadership Teams at Provider would probably be a factor in driving any changes to mindsets of faculties

“The Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs) are too detailed, most of the information does not support HE decision making”

- It was noted that the QIPs were easy to locate specific information, though there was a tendency to scan them for the relevant text

“In addition to tariff points, the only other information we really need to make an admissions decisions/convince faculty staff is assessment information and a breakdown of qualification content (i.e. percentage which is practical, academic, coursework, exams)”

- The group disagreed with this statement as other useful information might be needed, such as information on granular grading, aims of the qualification and the size in comparison to A Levels
- It was noted that the term BTEC is used as a catch-all term for a number of non-GCE qualifications. There needs to be work on changing the mindset of the sector and the above would only exacerbate the issue

"I expect UCAS to provide information on qualification reform"

- There was agreement that UCAS would be well-placed to provide information on reform and it is helpful for the sector to know what is coming up and the applicable entry cycle

A3/22/05 Sector Body updates

CCEA, Qualification Wales, SQA and Qfqual gave presentations with the current state of play for 2023 and the approaches to standards. It was noted that there were several consultations ongoing, and the links were to these were as follows:

'Made-for-Wales' GCSEs (Qualification Wales) –

<https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/qualified-for-the-future---have-your-say/have-your-say/>

Formule and equation sheets for GCSE (Ofqual) –

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-changes-to-the-assessment-of-mathematics-physics-and-combined-science-gcses-in-2023/proposed-changes-to-the-assessment-of-mathematics-physics-and-combined-science-gcses-in-2023>

Modern Foreign Language vocabulary (Ofqual) -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-changes-to-the-assessment-of-modern-foreign-language-gcses-from-2023/covering-requirements-for-the-assessment-of-vocabulary>

Resilience arrangements (Ofqual) –

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ensuring-the-resilience-of-the-qualifications-system-in-2023-gcse-as-a-level-project-and-aea/ensuring-the-resilience-of-the-qualifications-system-in-2023-gcse-as-a-level-project-and-aea>

A3/22/06 Policy update

There was a verbal policy update provided to the group.

It was noted that the Day 28 analysis has been released and a couple of key facts were relayed to the group:

- Reporting showed that there was an increase in acceptance by 1% on 2021, though this increase was 15% on 2019 which indicates the uplift has begun as flagged in the Journey to a Million work
- 37.3% of 18 years old are set to be entering Higher Education

In addition, a [WonkHE blog](#) has been published in response to queries received through UCAS press channels on increased competition, perceived 'lack of Clearing courses' and the narrative that international students are taking up places that were open to UK students (12% of students taking up UG places are international students vs. 14% in 2019).

Ofqual and Qualification Wales have announced the approaches to standards on grading last week with one of the main points of interest being the difference in approaches between the two. It was explained that whilst UCAS anticipates this impact to be fractional, a letter has been sent to schools and centres across England and Wales flagging these differences, as well as noting increased competition, apprenticeship opportunities and the new Widening Participation questions

Link to letters here: <https://www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/adviser-news/news/letter-advisers-ucas-chief-executive-clare-marchant>

In addition, UCAS have been working with Ofqual to inform their VTQ review and sharing thoughts on what is the art of the possible from a data-processing perspective at UCAS.

A number of reports have been published by UCAS since the last meeting of this group. This includes the Disability report shared in June which found that 23% disabled students were more likely to defer than those without a disability and over half of disabled students researched the support before submitting a UCAS application. Over the coming months, UCAS will be looking to release a Care Experience Report, Journey to a Million essay collection and an Apprenticeship piece with the Sutton Trust which is part of the 'Where Next' series.

The first cycle of admissions for T Level applicants seemed to have been positive with 410 out of the 510 applicants were placed by Day 28. It was noted that a future aim would be to map out the progression of these applicants, i.e. whether going to University or taking up an apprenticeship.

A3/22/07 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.

It was **AGREED** that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday 28 February and a placeholder would be put in the diary's shortly.