

Groups and Forums

Minutes

SPG/22/M2

Scottish Policy Group meeting

Held on Thursday 10 November 2022, in person at the University of Edinburgh

Chair:	Rebecca Gaukroger	University of Edinburgh
Present:	Claire Bannister Shona Barrie Carol Braverstock Caroline Davies Martin Gibbons Stacey Heather-Brash David Proudfoot Frances Rowan Jim Thewliss Kirsty Wadsley Helena Ziegler	Universities Scotland University of Stirling University of Aberdeen Fettes College University of St Andrews SAAS SFC SQA SLS LEAPS HELOA
Apologies:	Margaret Antonson Carina Macritchie Forbes Maginnis Alison Train	University of the Highlands and Islands SFC Levenmouth Academy LEAPS
UCAS in Attendance:	Holly Brown Georgia Marks Victoria Waterson Carys Willgoss	Policy Adviser Public Affairs Adviser Service Delivery Coordinator Principal Policy Adviser

Action

A2/22/01 Welcome and Apologies

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

A2/22/02 Minutes and actions from the previous meeting

The minutes were approved as a correct and accurate reflection of the last meeting. It was noted that there were no open actions.

A2/22/03 Chairs Update

The Chair provided the Group an update from previous UCAS Council meetings. It was noted that the UCAS application fee had been discussed

with Council members expressing concerns that it was acting as a barrier for certain groups such as carers, and that they were interested in exploring waivers. Clare Marchant, UCAS CEO, had agreed to take these comments forward to the next application fee review, which currently happens every two years, and that there was some flexibility for the application fee, for example Ukrainian applicants.

It was also noted that UCAS' work on predicted grades and their impact, with the report being published shortly. The report's findings will be compared against previous research in the area, for example the previous statements that disadvantaged students were being further disadvantaged due to predicted grades.

It was noted that the Reject by Default (RBD) and Decline by Default (DBD) dates were under review with the sector recognising that these activities are falling on exam dates and poor practice that meant applicants were receiving rejections on the morning of an exam. The Group agreed that HE providers should be taking accountability and making decisions earlier, working with internal admissions teams to encourage mindfulness of these key dates and impact on applicants.

A2/22/04 Shaping upcoming UCAS research: *What does 'value' mean to students, and how does it influence their decision-making?*

Holly Brown presented an overview of the UCAS Policy team's recent publications and the plans for future research on the meaning of value for applicants. All UCAS' reports can be found at:

<https://www.ucas.com/about-us/news-and-insights/ucas-reports>

The Group was split into three groups for a breakout session to discuss UCAS' initial findings. The following points were raised:

- The idea of skills is something that is instilled in the Scottish curriculum and could account for some of the differences with other nations
- Some prospective applicants don't start thinking about HE options as early as their peers which limits their options. There needs to be earlier IAG to get these individuals engaged earlier
- The Groups wished to see more granularity in the research, for example different student characteristics, tariff, subject areas or course type
- A lack of focus on the funding survey responses from Scottish students could be due to the differences in funding from other nations
- It will be interesting to see whether wellbeing is a post-covid blip or will continue to be a concern as the covid cohorts progress through primary and secondary school
- It was noted that the Group would be interested in seeing a year-on-year review and any shifts seen

A2/22/05 Campfire – member updates

The Group discussed the cost-of-living crisis and the impact on students, flagging the following:

- There were concerns about the unknown impact on potential applicants and whether less people will be applying in January, especially WP students. There is also uncertainty around accommodation – not only the price but whether more applicants will be choosing to live at home

- The Group requested UCAS to perform a temperature check with prospective applicants to check on behaviour after the January Equal Consideration Date (ECD) as any changes in behaviour would likely mean a change in offer making from HE providers
- HE providers have seen an increase in queries from prospective applicants and their parents about funding and the financial side of accommodation
- Demand for in-person has significantly increased this cycle which is having a knock-on impact on resource

UCAS
SPG004

It was **AGREED** that UCAS would keep the Group up to date of any insight related to cost-of-living during the cycle.

The Group expressed their concerns about the historic entry grade tool and restated that the tool does not work for the interpretation of Scottish qualifications. It was noted that UCAS would be presenting the updated product at an upcoming session which will be advertised through Universities Scotland.

It was noted that members would be interested in hearing about the UCAS Career Finder tool and portal updates and the progress with the inclusion of apprenticeships currently in place for English and Welsh opportunities.

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The Group **AGREED** that UCAS would work with SLS to better promote its training offering to advisers in Scotland, mindful of the increasing time pressure staff within schools are under.

UCAS
SPG006

An update was provided on the use of the new WP questions in the 2023 application for UK applicants. A total of 98% of applicants have responded to the section, with 1 in 5 providing a positive answer. The breakdown of positive responses is as follows:

- 11% - Free School Meals
- 4% - Care Experience
- 2.8% - Armed Forces
- 1% - Estrangement

It was flagged that these numbers were for those submitted by the October ECD and there would likely be changes by the January ECD.

SAAS

It was noted that SAAS has seen a similar increase in demand for in-person events, though are taking a hybrid approach to engagement. At present, SAAS are reviewing UCAS data and research and working through how to apply the findings.

LEAPS

It was raised that there are concerns from school staff about the impact of wellbeing issues on the application cycle.

SQA

SQA are continuing to review the examinations for summer 2023, though there is concern about the disparity in different approaches taken by England and Wales. It was noted that there was currently a consultation on national reform and appeals, and as part of this all HE Providers would be contacted.

A2/22/06 Any other business

The Group thanked Rebecca acting as Chair. It was noted that anyone interested in the role, or have any questions, could reach out to the Groups and Forums email (groupsandforums@ucas.ac.uk) or Carys Willgoss (C.Willgoss@ucas.ac.uk).

Jim Thewliss **AGREED** to secure a school or centre to host the next meeting. It was noted that once a location was confirmed, a date would be set.

LH
SPG007