

Minutes

SAG/19/M3

Student Advisory Group meeting

Held on Tuesday 22 October 2019 at UCAS, Cheltenham.

Chair: Coventry University

Present: Birkbeck College, University of London
St Dominic's Sixth Form College
University of Hertfordshire

Secondary Education
Advisory Group

Member: Hilary Munday Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe

Undergraduate Advisory

Group Member: Claire Pryke University of Bradford

Apologies: Bath Spa University
Holy Cross College
Imperial College, London
London South Bank University
Newent School
Nottingham Trent University
Royal College of Music (Conservatoire)
University of Bristol
University of Gloucestershire
University of Liverpool
University of Nottingham
University of Reading
University of South Wales
University of Surrey

UCAS in
attendance: Courteney Sheppard Customer Experience Manager
Deniz Gosai Provider Engagement Coordinator
Adam Mitchell Head of Business Development

Presenting: Carys Fisher Senior Policy Executive
Hazel Rudge Principal Data Scientist
Jessica Deakin Product Owner
Peter Derrick Head of Service Delivery (Operations)
Rebecca Bale Strategy Manager
Sam Sheppard Product Owner

A3/19/01 Welcome and apologies

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

A3/19/02 Minutes and action log from previous meeting

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

Updates on the open actions from the log included:

Contextualised admissions information – www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-resources-and-training/guides-and-resources/widening-participation#contextual.

Unconditional offers information – www.ucas.com/undergraduate/after-you-apply/ucas-undergraduate-types-offer.

All other actions were closed prior to the meeting.

A3/19/03 Apprenticeships

UCAS was aware of the importance apprenticeships played within the post-18 education market, and so was improving the information and advice held on ucas.com. In addition to this, UCAS was also ensuring information on apprenticeships was available at some of UCAS' events and exhibitions.

UCAS wanted to find out what they could do to support students and advisers in finding apprenticeships. The following questions were asked:

1. Did you consider or are you considering a higher or degree apprenticeship as a post-18 choice? Why or why not?

Some Group members had considered the apprenticeship route, but decided against it as they preferred academic learning. Others struggled to find information, as often their colleges pushed university degrees onto them. There was also limited information on apprenticeships in more rural areas, as most were linked to larger companies in bigger towns and cities. Although the number was still lower than the 'traditional university route', schools had seen an increase in applicants completing apprenticeships, and some schools had held their own apprenticeship events. The Group asked whether UCAS could provide apprenticeship information at all their events. It was also confirmed that UCAS was holding workshops at ten UCAS events, to support teachers and advisers on apprenticeships, although it was noted that students and parents, themselves, were not clear on how to access apprenticeships, as often the applicant needed to work for a company first. Overall, the Group stated that apprenticeships was a more specific route for an applicant to take, and as the market was not open enough at the moment, there was a lot of confusion around it.

2. Which sectors/subjects or career areas would interest you?

Many applicants did not know what they wanted to do as a future career, and so wanted to keep their options open. With an apprenticeship, applicants felt like they would need to be committed to working for the company, and so had to be sure of what they wanted to do from a young age. There were some cost implications if an applicant did not complete their apprenticeship, such as paying the cost of training back to the employer. However, this was determined on a case-by-case situation by the employer themselves. The school representative on the Group noted that many applicants who did apply to complete an apprenticeship, was interested in broader STEM subjects (including finance), and that the association of universities was important to applicants.

Bex Bale asked the Group to speak to other students and then to email her with some feedback on these questions, at r.bale@ucas.ac.uk.

Group
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A3/19/04 Data driven personas and how we use them

A learner persona presentation was shared with the Group. The work was still in progress and sought to get student views on how best to progress.

Seven personas were shown to the Group. 'Becca' represented the vast number of UCAS' applicants. POLAR quintiles were explained as how socially advantaged an applicant was, based on their postcode. Quintile 5 held the most advantaged students, and quintile 1 held the least advantaged.

The feedback from the Group on personas included:

- Could persona information backfire, as universities could target specific personas? This was a possible risk which UCAS would need to manage. However, UCAS hoped that it would give providers a better understanding of their applicants. The Group suggested that UCAS could use the angle of 'this is what you are missing' to providers.
- Was there a risk of universities targeting a specific applicant which they want to increase recruitment for, and potentially bombard these applicants with communication? Again, this was a risk which UCAS would need to monitor. However, information would also be available in the UCAS Hub for applicants.
- The data on international applicants was missing, and so this type of persona was currently unclear.
- The persona images would change to be fully representative when the idea moves from a proof of concept.
- Would applicants be able to change their personas, or would they never know which group they fall into? UCAS wanted to validate the information and would be careful when tailoring the concepts. Students would add their information in the student hub, which would determine which persona they were.
- This concept could be useful for providers to segment communications to different groups.
- Could personal statements help enrich personas? Individual sentences or statements from the personal statement would never be identified, just common/popular words. UCAS had to check with their legal team as to whether an applicant needed to be informed that their personal statement would be analysed for this purpose. However, the personal statement would

be used for future applicants personas, as it would be too late by this stage to influence the individual applicants persona.

Personas was currently in the planning stages, and it was hoped that it would go out to development within the next six months. An update would be provided at the next meeting, along with the decision on the opting in/out statement for personal statements.

A3/19/05 Review of Confirmation and Clearing

A presentation on Confirmation and Clearing (C&C) was shared with the Group. Questions and feedback from the Group included:

- What were the questions asked during C&C over the phone/social media? The general questions included clarity around Track being correct, how to add Clearing choices, and the anxiety on not yet being released. There were some online tutorials, but UCAS was aware that improvements in this area were required.
- 'Decline my place' – was this too front-facing? There had been a lot of help text provided. The applicant also had to choose the right reason before it would let them decline their place. However, UCAS would look into whether the button size and positioning needed to change next year. It was also noted, that if an applicant did release themselves by mistake, this could be reversed with the permission of the provider, and only on the same day of the release.
- Could UCAS track applicants through Clearing? UCAS was doing more joint research with HESA, especially in this area. It was noted that over 1,000 applicants did return to a provider they had originally applied for. UCAS suspected that many applicants had released themselves through Clearing instead of completing a course change. Better guidance on this would be provided next year.
- A quarter of applicants ended up with a provider who was in one of their original five choices. Career advisers were satisfied with this, as they felt that the applicant would have carried out significant research first.

A3/19/06 UCAS corporate strategy (2020-2025)

A presentation on UCAS' new corporate strategy was shared with the Group, and a short discussion on what the student of 2025 would look like, and what they would expect from UCAS, was had.

Comments included:

- Some members of the Group thought applicants would expect support from UCAS through their full education life cycle, including easier transfers between universities, and shortening the application process between levels.
- Other members of the Group suggested that heightened social media pressure would be required, such as YouTube tutorials and updates on Twitter.
- By 2025, the 18-year-old population would have increased again, and so there could be fewer places for applicants, especially if number controls were brought in again

- It was suggested that having flexible deadlines, could help integrate apprenticeships, however, some applicants saw flexible deadlines as having negative impact.

A3/19/07 UCAS Sync – What does the future of Clearing look like?

The 2020 undergraduate application form was shown to the Group.

It was asked whether the instructions, which were currently on the right-hand side, could be changed depending on user preference. The design layout would be accessibility tested when it went through design.

The key change to the application form was that it now included a profile. This meant that the applicant could input personal information, which would be saved, so there was no need to re-upload information for subsequent applications. The profile information could be updated at any point in the cycle, even after submission. However, personal statements and references could not be changed after submission, although agent information could be. There would be some clear help text around this.

Other fields in the application was shown to the Group:

- Application questions – these would be the same for all courses.
- Residency and nationality – depending on where the applicant selected, additional questions could be asked. Bulk uploads for documents (such as passports) had also been added.
- Supporting information – this was a new section, which was designed for the applicant to inform the provider if they required additional support when studying. The heading of this field was likely to change as it was misleading applicants.
- ‘Change your mind’ would still be available immediately after the application was submitted, but not all options would be available until the right timeframe.
- Extra would still be available – however, the lock in time would be reduced to 14 days. It would also be activated from 16 January.

The Group commented that the new interface looked more modern.

The Group was encouraged to sign into the user experience environment. More detailed information on how to access the environment was sent by email after the meeting. A follow up would be included at the next meeting.

An update and presentation on the changes for the Clearing process was provided.

A UCAS Clearing Working Group had been set up a few years ago, which proposed some recommendations on how Clearing could improve. UCAS had looked at these recommendations, and had decided to implement three of them: the ‘I’m still looking’ flag, pushed offers, and online self-release.

‘I’m still looking’ flag – as soon as an applicant places their application into Clearing, providers would be able to see it (providing the applicant had given the provider their

PID). Providers would be able to see all information, including personal statements and references. Applicants could put themselves into clearing if they held conditional or unconditional offers, or had no offers at all. School members were concerned that this could encourage a non-research mentality. However, it was confirmed that this would not encourage new behaviour, but current behaviour which could then be monitored. The Group liked the changes, and confirmed that the more options available was better. It would also reduce the pressure for applicants.

Pushed offers – if an applicant was holding a provisional offer, they could put themselves into Clearing. The provider who the applicant was holding the offer with would be able to see this. When in Clearing, other providers could make the applicant offers. If the applicant was holding a conditional offer, providers would be able to see the application, but would not be able to push any offers, until the applicant had been released from other provider. All current offers would be retained, unless the applicant asked for them to be released.

Applicants would have a minimum time of 17:00 on the next working day to make a decision. On A level results day, UCAS was looking at maintaining a minimum time period (currently 15:00). The Group agreed that this was the right decision, as applicants needed the time to think about their options.

Online self-release – was explained to the Group, earlier in the meeting.

A3/19/08 Any other business

The following any other business was noted:

Katie Morton, University of Hertfordshire, was the deputy chair for the Group.

The Groups membership would be reviewed, to encourage a better attendance rate at meetings. UCAS was happy for future meetings to be held in London, or elsewhere, if it made traveling easier.

The UCAS Council Induction day was taking place on Wednesday 6 November 2019 at UCAS, and it was hoped that a student panel could be part of this day. The Group was asked to contact Courteney Sheppard if they would like to take part in this – c.sheppard@ucas.ac.uk.

On Wednesday 4 December 2019 a round table discussion on provider questions and best practice would be held, and it was asked whether any students would like to take part in this. Again, they should contact Courteney.

The link to the UCAS Hub could be found here – www.ucas.com/what-are-my-options/create-your-ucas-hub-today

The UCAS Admissions Conference was taking place on Tuesday 28 and Wednesday 29 April 2020. It was asked whether two members from the Group would be happy to attend, to share what the Group has covered over the last 18 months.

UCAS and the Chair welcomed student ideas for the agenda. It was noted that one applicant had received an email to say that they were invited to visit a provider

campus for an interview, although the interview would not count towards their application, nor was the information showing on Track. It was confirmed that this was a marketing tool by the provider, but an agenda item would be included around best practice and offer making.

The next meeting would take place on Wednesday 18 March 2020. The venue was still to be confirmed.