

Minutes

SAG/20/M1

Student Advisory Group meeting

Held on Wednesday 18 March 2020, via Microsoft Teams.

Chair: Coventry University

Present: Birkbeck College, University of London
University of Gloucestershire
University of Hertfordshire
University of Nottingham
University of Surrey

UCAS in attendance:	Courteney Sheppard	Customer Experience Manager (Learners)
	Deniz Gosai	Provider Engagement Coordinator
	Sharon Brennan	Lead Product Manger
	Simone Drinkwater	Head of Implementation (New Business)

Presenting:	Ben Jordan	Strategy and Insights Manager
	Peter Derrick	Interim Head of Operations Transformation

A1/20/01 Welcome and apologies

The Group was welcomed to the meeting and members introduced themselves.

A1/20/02 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:

USAG010 – no apprenticeship feedback had been received from the Group. This action remained open.

All other actions were closed prior to the meeting.

A1/20/03 UCAS' corporate strategy

The 'Discover your future' presentation was shared with the Group. The strategic objectives were explained, and the core purpose was still UCAS' priority. The strategy could be read online at <https://ucasdigital.com/corporate-strategy-2020-25/>. Currently, there was not a demand for an apprenticeship centralised admissions service. However, an introductory model would be welcomed, alongside modular learning and Level 4/5 provisions models.

It was confirmed that the Office for Students (OfS) review was currently on hold, however the Admission Review was still being undertaken.

The following points were noted:

- UCAS believed that, through the flexible strategy approach, students would have access to the right provider for them, throughout their whole learning journey.
- Perspective and mature students were engaged with when consulting on the strategy. This was done through surveys, in the customer experience teams, NUS, and focus groups. It was confirmed that over 300 hours of engagement took place with all customer groups.
- It was noted, that for perspective applicants who knew what they wanted to study, the strategy looked sensible. However, it was asked what UCAS was doing for applicants who did not know what they wanted to go on and do. It was confirmed that the Hub should help with this.
- Some applicants chose their course study based on what their final achievement would be (for example, ethical, monetary). It was asked whether UCAS had developed any tools to aid with the more ethical reasons. It was confirmed that, although the Buzz quiz and career explorer tool would help applicants narrow courses down, these were both data-driven tools, and it was a valued point which would be taken forward.

CS SAG011

A1/20/04 Future Finance promotion

Although the Group acknowledged that UCAS had ceased working with Future Finance, it was asked whether the mistakes learnt had changed UCAS' policy in relation to working with third parties. UCAS' commercial activity statement was available online at www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/update-our-commercial-activity, and it was agreed that UCAS' policy would be shared with the CS SAG012 Group. The Chair was happy with UCAS' response, but was concerned that similar mistakes would not be made in the future, for example, with the accommodation platform.

A1/20/05 Reform and reimagine workstream – including product-based approach and UCAS Sync update

A presentation on reform and reimagine (R&R) was shared with the Group.

It was noted that the Office for Student (OfS) was the English regulator. However, UCAS would be considering options for all four nations. UCAS agreed to share its response to the OfS review with the Group, in the future. CS SAG013

The following acronyms were explained:

- PQA – post-qualifications admissions: applicants applied after receiving their qualifications.
- PQO – post-qualifications offers: higher education providers sending out offers after qualifications received.
- PQD – post-qualification decisions: higher education providers making decisions after qualifications received.

Reforming the insurance choice

Two options on how the insurance choice could be amended were explained to the Group. Feedback included:

- With option two, applicants might need to go through Clearing if they did not meet their conditions for their first choice, and had not received offers for their other choices. However, it was noted that research in this had been carried out, and only around 1,000 applicants (out of around 35,00) did not meet their insurance choice requirements.
- The offers outlined in option one would be contractual. UCAS' initial thinking was that applicants would list their choices in order of preference, but was interested in hearing students' thoughts on this.
- It was asked how the options would work if an applicant was applying to providers who all required the same grades. It was noted that providers behaved differently during Confirmation and Clearing, Therefore, if the applicant did not meet the grades for one provider, another might still accept them. The downside to this would be with option two, as if a provider's course was full, then they potentially could not make an offer.

Representing entry requirements and student achievement on entry

The different types of visualisations were shown to the Group. Feedback included:

- 18 year olds might not understand the visuals correctly, resulting in false expectations. This had been noted, and UCAS was considering adding a 'typical offer grade' to the visualisations.
- The visualisations could be useful if they were used in-line with reforming insurance choices, as noted above.
- The Group preferred the graphs or box plot to the violin plot.
- The lower end averages were contextualised admissions, and this would need to be communicated to applicants.
- It was questioned how the visualisations would work for creative courses which required portfolios and auditions. This was being considered, and one option would be to add a statement to these courses.
- There was a concern within the Group, that what a provider offered one year was not the same to the next year, and again could be misleading.

Reforming the personal statement

UCAS was discussing how personal statements could be improved. One option was to keep the statements, but provide applicants with more structural advice and guidance. In addition, UCAS was considering working with providers to produce additional questions to be included in the statement, if they were looking for specific information. The following feedback on personal statements was received:

- Schools often had different advice compared to UCAS. UCAS confirmed that it had worked with higher education providers to produce a tool. However, it acknowledged that it needed to carry out further work to understand what providers used the statements for.
- The idea of adding extra drop-down boxes was liked by the Group. Applicants found it frustrating when writing one personal statement for four very different providers.

A1/20/06 Any other business and close

The future of the Student Advisory Group

A discussion on the future of the Group was held. It was confirmed that membership was broad, as it was hard for students to commit their time to the meetings. Current membership term was two years, but if a student wished to remain on the Group, then they could do so, providing circumstances allowed. DG SAG014

It was agreed that meetings would continue as two face-to-face meetings per year, and one virtual meeting, but this would be reviewed again in the future. June's virtual meeting could potentially be moved to July or August, and the autumn meeting would be held in London.

The Group asked for more information on agenda items to be sent out in advance of the meetings, so it had time to read and prepare for discussions. It was also suggested that having union bodies on the Group would be worthwhile.

Action

It was asked whether UCAS could facilitate some professional development and work experience, to help enhance skills. CS SAG015

The Group was asked to contact the Chair, Grace Cappy - ab6234@coventry.ac.uk, if they had any ideas on how to improve it. Group SAG016

Update on UCAS Sync

It was confirmed that UCAS had paused their 'big bang' approach to deliver UCAS Sync in May 2020, and smaller, bitesize products and services would be released on an incremental basis.

Close

The Group was thanked for attending the meeting, and wished good luck for their upcoming exams.