

Minutes

SAG/22/M3

Student Advisory Group meeting

Wednesday 19 October 2022 virtually through Microsoft Teams.

Chair:	Wayne Gouro	University of Oxford
Present:	Salma Ghassan Al Azmeh Molly Jenkinson Obinna Okereke Colin Omorodion Amina Riasat Abhishek Saha Amy Vince	Goldsmith University of London University of Oxford Coventry University University of Southampton Manchester Metropolitan University University of Oxford University of Hertfordshire
Apologies:	Bethany Furlong Lauren Jones Imaani Mitchell George Obolo	Edge Hill University Swansea University University of Gloucestershire University of Manchester
UCAS in attendance:	Genia Garrity Courteney Sheppard Matt Wasley-Wood Victoria Waterson	Lead Product Manager Head of Customer Contact Lead Product Manager Service Delivery Coordinator
Presenting:	Kim Eccleston Callie Hawkins Michael Lockhart Ellie Rowley	Head of Strategy and Reform Lead Product Manager Data Scientist Fair Access Programme Lead
Observing:	Melanie Allford	UX researcher

Action

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:

SAG032 would remain open as the UCAS Customer Success Team and other customer-facing team continue to have meetings with Higher Education Providers

A3/22/03 UCAS Fair access programme

Ellie Rowley and Callie Hawkins provided the Group an overview of UCAS' planned Fair Access programme. The first initiatives to be launched was the FE Colleges Programme, launch that week, and 'Train the Trainer' which would serve as an Information, Advice and Guidance resource for those involved in supporting summer schools and mentoring schemes. It was noted that the programme's aim was to be a source of truth for those supporting students with their applications.

It was also noted that UCAS were working on an 'Outreach Connection Service' that would advertise outreach activities and events in one place. This would be for teachers and advisers as part of Phase 1, with the intention to open to prospective applicants in following phases. The Group provided the following feedback on the Outreach Connection Service:

- The Group viewed this development as a positive initiative as prospective applicants would have proactive and knowledgeable about the different locations' opportunities are made public. It was seen as beneficial to have them in one place
- It was raised that it would be good to have the ability to refine searches by proximity from postcode and/or county or regions
- The current user interface was viewed as quite busy, and it would be positive to have increased filtering to make the selection more manageable and relevant`

It was noted that UCAS aimed to move towards personalisation of the choices shown to each applicant in the future. It was **AGREED** that links to the Office for Students (OfS) Access and Participation Plans (APP) would be made available to the Group alongside the minutes.

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A3/22/04 Personal statements

An update on Admission Reform was given by Kim Eccleston with a focus on Personal Statements and choices.

It was noted that UCAS continues to work with customer groups to determine the best model for the Personal Statements and to devise possible questions in case the sector was to move to a Personal Statement divided into sections. The aim of this reform is to ensure that, regardless of background and level of support, an applicant can understand what is required based on the guidance and questions. The Group shared the following comments:

- By breaking the Personal Statement into sections, it would be more accessible and would be less of a blank canvas
- It would be positive to greater flexibility and have the functionality to have different Statements for different courses, for example where applicants are applying for a year in industry or year abroad in addition to the 3-year course
- An ideal timing for making the development available in the cycle would be May the year before applying. This would catch Year 12 students before their exams and would allow them some time to understand the changes whilst potentially completing their first draft over the Summer
- There would need to be a lot of work on the guidance ahead of the development launch to ensure that teacher, advisers and parents are informed
- The current proposed questions are repetitive, especially a number of them would naturally be linked in the current format
- There were concerns that the 'Credibility' section would lead to unintended discrimination or prejudice, for example, if an applicant is from a less economically developed country. In addition, it was highlighted that the 'Relevant experience' section might also lead to bias with disadvantaged students less likely to have the resource or connections to complete the same activities as some more advantaged students. It was suggested that the relevant experience could be wrapped into the preparation for the course
- A phased in approach was suggested for the proposed reform with the questions included in the application cycle preceding the full release, though they would not be mandatory

- To help those applicants with little support from family, friends and schools, example sentences or paragraphs would be beneficial
- There were some further concerns that by making the extenuating circumstances question compulsory, applicants would feel that it is necessary to complete the section regardless as they would be at a disadvantage against those who complete the section. It was also noted that the extenuating circumstances section did not feel like it would naturally sit under the Personal Statement and could instead be a part of one of the other sections with personal information. Similar had been proposed for any credibility questions

The Group would be able to submit any further feedback by emailing reform@ucas.ac.uk.

A3/22/05 Choices and exploration

It was noted UCAS were also gathering customers' views on the number of choices an applicant can choose and whether the Insurance choice is appropriate/works. This data will be used to inform work around a 'Journey to a Million' applicants. The following was discussed:

Number of Choices

- It was **AGREED** that the data would be circulated alongside the minutes with a breakdown of the demographic of participants
- There was a general agreement that applicants probably had one or two institutions in mind when applying, and where applicants did not want to apply to multiple at those institutions, they were filling up the choices with options they did not intend to take up

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Insurance Choice

- It was noted that there was a lack of awareness in the Group about the Insurance choice which further adds to the argument that further advice and guidance is required, as well as revisiting of the terminology used
- The Group voiced concerns about the removal of insurance with no safety-net in place

A3/22/06 Any other business and Close

UCAS were revisiting the lifestyle survey during Freshers Week and were sending out a call for volunteers for a 45-minute discussion with the Survey Team. Anyone who would like to take part in this discussion were asked to email m.lockhart@ucas.ac.uk.

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 date of the next meeting is Wednesday 15 February 2023.