

Minutes

SAG/22/M2

Student Advisory Group meeting

Held on Wednesday 8 June 2022, virtually through MS Teams

Chair: University of Oxford

Present: Manchester Metropolitan University
Edge Hill University
University of Southampton
University of Manchester
University of Hertfordshire (2 members)
Goldsmith University of London
Lancaster University

UCAS in attendance:	Callie Hawkins	Lead Product Manager
	Deniz Gosai	Customer Engagement Coordinator

Presenting:	Fin Willicott	Marketing Product Lead
	Gabriela Geeson	Customer Insights Lead
	Kim Eccleston	Head of Strategy and Reform

Observing:	Emma Cole	Product Owner
	Judith Spalding	Product Owner
	Victoria Waterson	Service Delivery Coordinator

A2/22/01 Welcome and apologies

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

A2/22/02 Minutes and action log from previous meeting

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

All actions were closed prior to the meeting.

A2/22/03 Personal statements and gender question*Personal statements*

An overview on why UCAS was considering reforming the personal statement was provided and some slides were shared. The following feedback was noted:

- The Group supported the proposal to reform the personal statement.
- Mature students required guidance on what providers would like to see in a personal statement.
- If personal statements were more relevant to providers would it encourage more universities/colleges read them?
- Could UCAS highlight which sections were more important for which courses/providers? UCAS was considering this but would need to carry out some applicant behavioural research first.
- It was requested that any changes needed to support applicants with disabilities.
- Longer term, UCAS was looking into HR processes to see if personal statements could be presented in different forms (i.e., videos).

Gender question

It was noted that the UCAS application asked applicants about their gender but had only two responses available -male or female -which described legal sex and not gender. UCAS was aware that this was not correct and asked the Group their thoughts on whether UCAS should:

1. Remove the question from the form.
2. Keep the question and replace existing responses with multiple gender responses.
3. Keep the existing responses and change the question to legal sex; or
4. Keep the question and replace responses with multiple gender responses with real options AND add in additional legal sex question with legal sex responses?

It was confirmed that the data gathered from the question was collected by UCAS for research and monitoring, checking identity (when required) and passed to HESA on behalf of providers and also used when visa/DBS applications were required. UCAS would need to find out whether, legally, the question could be made optional.

The Group confirmed that applicants would need clarification on what their data was used for and asked whether the data could be obtained but not passed onto providers. The Group were in general agreement that UCAS should only ask legal sex if that was what was legally required and dismiss everything else.

A conversation about whether the question should be mandatory took place. The Group noted here the challenges with applicants who were in the transition phase or hadn't told their parents/were not yet comfortable selecting the true option. It was also suggested that information could be provided alongside the question directly applicants to advise if they required it

A2/22/04 Entry Grades

UCAS wanted to provide more advice and guidance to learners when they were researching, to help them be more aspirational in their choices. As a result, some designs showing entry grade data had been put together and was shown to the Group.

It was noted that disadvantaged learners might have a higher chance of getting into a university with lower grades due to their circumstances. This would be highlighted to these students only.

The Group fed back the following:

- The data might do the opposite of what was intended as if it showed a low possibility of receiving an offer, it might discourage applicants from applying.
- Achieving good grades at school or college did not necessarily mean doing well at university.
- It should clearly state that the data used was not from Clearing but main scheme applicants.
- Could a traffic light system (red, yellow, green) or high, medium, low be used instead of a percentage?
- Would additional advice and guidance be provided to applicants with lower grades?
- Does the algorithm know which courses are being studied? Some courses might need a specific grade in a specific subject. It was confirmed that further research on this had been carried out but was not visible in the entry grades tool. The exact subjects would be listed in the course requirements.
- The statistics would be clear to some student but a short summary explaining what they showed would be useful.
- Some members liked that the data was available before the applicant applied.
- It was asked whether clear requirements would be available to widening participation applicants as it differed from provider to provider. UCAS was trying to come up with a widening participation definition.

It was noted that the grades used initially would be A levels, Scottish Highers and BTECs, so the tool would not be applicable to international learners.

A2/22/05 Accommodation experience

A questionnaire was sent out the Group asking their feedback on a number of accommodation questions. The following was also noted:

- More information for second year (and beyond) students on when they should start looking for accommodation was required.
- Generally, first year students would get university owned accommodation, whereas second and third years would need to source private accommodation or wait until after first year allocation was complete.
- Some universities accommodation options were very limited.
- A budget tool, alongside accommodation options would be welcomed, including council tax exemptions, insurance, etc.
- Reviews from previous students, in a central (non-biased) place was required. Students would trust UCAS to 'host' reviews.
- Top reasons for deciding on accommodation included reviews from students, affordability, location, security and hygiene.
- Information on rights as a tenant would be useful.
- Universities tended to advertise accommodation through social media and directly by emailing students.
- If a student obtains a place through Clearing they were unlikely to get any accommodation as there was no reserve lists.
- No advice was available for international applicants.
- The process for booking accommodation was straight forward for home students.

Members noted that if UCAS could provide some information then security, hygiene, price comparison, travel cost in the area and student satisfaction rate, as well as how individual providers allocate accommodation, would be on the top of their list.

A2/22/06 Any other business and Close

The Group asked how UCAS included inclusivity and diversity on ucas.com. Currently a number of ['Where Next'](#) reports were being produced which covered this subject.

It was also asked how UCAS was ensuring that their website was not information overload. The Hub had been designed to tailor specific advice and options to learners.

Finally, it was asked whether UCAS could inform providers of the importance of them sharing their non-disclosure policies online, as security was especially important to students.

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