

Minutes

SAG/21/M1

Student Advisory Group meeting

Held on virtually through MS Teams on Wednesday 17 February 2021

Chair: University of Gloucestershire

Present: Birkbeck University of London
Coventry University
Edge Hill University
Goldsmith University
Lancaster University
Manchester Metropolitan University
Queen Mary University of London (2 representatives)
Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe
Swansea University (2 representatives)
University of Gloucestershire
University of Hertfordshire
University of Southampton
University of Surrey
University of Wolverhampton (2 representatives)

UCAS in attendance: Courteney Sheppard Senior Customer Experience Manager (Students)
Deniz Gosai Provider Engagement Coordinator
Kim Eccleston Customer Adoption Lead (UCAS Sync)
Lynsey Hopkins Relationship Manager and Service Transition Lead

Observing: Alison Charles Relationship Manager
Genia Garrity New Products Engagement Manager

A1/21/01 Welcome and apologies, minutes and action log

The Group was welcomed to the meeting. Each member introduced themselves.

The minutes were approved as an accurate reflection of the last meeting. All Student Advisory Group minutes were published on ucas.com.

The open actions from the log were discussed:

SAG019 – Responses had been received from members detailing how learning had been impacted due to the pandemic. If the Group had any further comments, they were asked to email Courteney Sheppard – c.sheppard@ucas.ac.uk. This feedback was of interest to UCAS as it helped UCAS understand whether more information and support was required to students.

SAG021 – The Student Advisory Group membership was currently full. This action was paused until new vacancies became available.

SAG022 – An update on ‘My Application’ would be shared during the next Student Advisory Group meeting.

SAG023 - Imaani Mitchell, University of Gloucestershire, had become the Group’s new Chair. This action was closed.

A1/21/02 Higher Education Admissions Reform: Principles and input workshop

The Department for Education (DfE) had released a higher education admission reform consultation for England. UCAS would be responding to the consultation and was interested in hearing the opinions of all their customers, including students. The Group was asked what they thought were the important principals for an excellent admission service. Feedback included:

- Admissions should be taken back to its core. Applicants were told that universities read each personal statement but during Clearing decisions were made very quickly.
- Applying to university, and the application form, should be as simple as possible. For example, the GCSE list was often unclear.
- The application should have more inclusivity options – this would make the service feel more welcoming.
- The timeframe for Clearing felt rushed (choosing a university, accommodation, moving all within a few weeks).
- Teachers were relied upon for a lot of support. It was asked whether videos could be uploaded to help applicants when completing their applications.
- Schools put pressure on students to complete their applications, and so they could lose sight of why they were applying to university.
- Many universities had their own hubs for updating their applicants with the application progression (for example interview dates). This became confusing. The Group unanimously agreed that has a central place (such as Track) to hold this information was preferred.

- Could a reason be added to Track to inform applicants why their university place had not yet been confirmed – this would reduce the amount of unnecessary stress on applicants.
- There was a discussion about whether applicants should apply with predicted grades or actual grades. Although applying with actual grades appeared a good option it could also hamper an applicant's hope if their predictions were low.
- Applicants should receive university decisions when schools/colleges were open so that they had support available.
- Applicants should consider why they would like to attend a specific university and look at the course in detail. This highlighted the importance of open days.
- Teachers were very influential, this could have a positive or negative impact, depending on how well the teacher knew the student.
- It was questioned how much support mature students had.
- It was difficult for international and mature applicants to complete the references section on the form. Additionally, applicants did not have access to their references. These were often referred to during interviews which made it difficult for applicants to prepare for.
- The Group agreed that personal statements was a good way to prepare applicants for university and the challenge was good as it helped them focus on why they were applying to university and choosing the course. It was suggested that personal statements could be changed to 'motivational statement' and a different one written for each university/course.

An Admission Reform presentation was shared with the Group. The model comparisons were explained.

It was noted that 'assessments' noted in the model did not refer to formal tests but would mostly be universities reviewing personal statements, applications etc.

It was questioned how applying late (through the PQA and PQO models) would affect applying for accommodation and finance as these often had lengthy processes. It was noted that many universities did offer accommodation to Clearing applicants so it could be done, however, the volume would be much greater. However, on the other hand, some providers did not have the capacity to accommodate all students, with the accommodation guarantee valid only for those with the provider selected as their firm or insurance choice. This provided concerns with some members and could put some applicants off applying to providers if accommodation could not be guaranteed.

There was a discussion on predicted grades. One member noted that the PQA and PQO (DfE) model appeared to remove the bias from predicted grades, as schools often over predicted, and universities put their offers higher than what they would accept. It was suggested that applicants could still receive predicted grades so that they knew which universities they could consider, but the grades would not be added to the application form. It was also suggested that the application form could be completed at any point during the year, but not submitted until two-three weeks after results day, to make final adjustments.

The Group was asked to complete a [one question survey](#) to state which model they preferred.

Any additional thoughts should be emailed to reform@ucas.ac.uk.

A1/21/03 Any other business and Close

UCAS was hosting a student panel session during the Admission Conference on Tuesday 30 March 2021 from 12:55 – 1:45. The Group was asked to email Courteney Sheppard if they would like to take part in the session.

The Group was thanked for replying to Courteney's email relating to the Ofqual summer examination consultation. UCAS had collated all the feedback and was awaiting DfE's response.

The date of the next meeting would be confirmed shortly.