

## Minutes

SAG/21/M2

Student Advisory Group meeting

Held on Thursday 17 June 2021 virtually through MS Teams

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Chair: University of Gloucestershire

Present: Birkbeck University of London  
Coventry University (2 members)  
Edge Hill University  
Goldsmith University of London  
Lancaster University  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Swansea University  
University of Gloucestershire  
University of Hertfordshire  
University of Southampton  
University of Wolverhampton

UCAS in  
and Advisers  
attendance: Callie Hawkins Customer Experience Manager – Students  
and Students  
Courtney Sheppard Senior Customer Success Manager  
Deniz Gosai Provider Engagement Coordinator

Presenting: Craig Froggatt Team Manager  
Kim Eccleston Customer Adoption Lead  
Lynsey Hopkins Relationship Manager and Service  
Transition Lead  
Peter Derrick Head of Service Delivery (Operations)

**A2/21/01 Welcome and apologies**

The Group was welcomed to the meeting. Callie Hawkins, Customer Experience Manager – Advisers and Students, introduced herself. Callie was now the owner for the Student Advisory Group.

**A2/21/02 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:

SAG013 – The OfS review was still on hold. This action was paused.

SAG015 – Members of the Group were asked to email Callie Hawkins – [c.hawkins@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:c.hawkins@ucas.ac.uk) if they had any examples of the type of work experience they would like at UCAS.

SAG201 – Group members were asked to contact Deniz Gosai – [d.gosai@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:d.gosai@ucas.ac.uk) if their roles had changed or could no longer commit to the Group. The membership would then be reviewed before seeking new members.

Actions SAG019 and SAG022 were covered during the meeting. These actions were closed.

**A2/21/03 Reimagining UK Admissions update and next steps**

The Group was thanked for their feedback during the last discussion on Reform.

An updated presentation on Reimagining UK Admissions was shared with the Group.

A [report](#) on Reimagining UK Admissions was released in May 2021. The proposed PQO model was explained. UCAS was cautiously backing this model but were aware that there were some further challenges which needed to be overcome first. Initial feedback from the Group was that the model could reduce the stress on the applicant.

The Group was asked their opinion on Reform. The following feedback was provided. give the following feedback:

- Some students were anxious about not meeting their offers on their grades achieved, even though there were students being accepted with lower grades than their offers. It was noted that a tool was available to advisers which showed universities aggregate acceptance grades over the last three years. This could be used to help applicants in their decision making.
- Some members of the group felt receiving offers when studying for exams was a motivation for many applicants to do well. Removing the offer stage to after results had been received might cause increased anxiety amongst students. UCAS was carrying out some behavioural research to see what factors influence student's decision making.

- It was asked whether there would be a time limit in the new model where universities had to make offers by. UCAS believed that that system worked well due to having a strict structure so would be implementing deadlines.
- On a positive, applicants who did better than expected could be able to explore other places if they had their grades beforehand.

The Group was encouraged to email [reform@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:reform@ucas.ac.uk) if they had any further comments or feedback.

#### **A2/21/04 Chat bot demonstration**

UCAS had operated a Chat Bot on Facebook for the past four years, however the platform felt quite clunky and did not produce any reporting data to UCAS. As a result, UCAS decided it was time for the platform to be updated.

The Diaglogflow was shared with the Group. The following points were noted:

- Due to UCAS running four different schemes, UCAS had to build language into the Bot so that it could understand what scheme the user was asking about.
- UCAS stripped back to seven common questions which would cover all schemes.
- Text responses included links to individual application schemes so that the applicant could search for additional information.
- If question could not be answered the applicant could be put through to a human.
- The Chat Bot was only available on Twitter and Facebook.
- The Chat Bot was currently only reactive. It could not see when a learner was on the website to ask if they needed help.

A live conversation with the Bot was shown to the Group. When the conversation was passed to a human the Bot would not jump in and try and take over.

There had been over 9,000 interactions from March 2021 which had resolved around 25% of queries. This was a positive move for UCAS, as it meant UCAS could help answer questions when the Customer Success Team was closed. UCAS was now hoping to develop a service which would work over Confirmation and Clearing. It was also hoped the reporting features could be developed.

#### **A2/21/05 Operational update and what we are working towards**

A verbal operational update was provided to the Group.

Most applicants had now received a reply from all their applications, although a few might still be waiting if they applied after the January equal consideration deadline (ECD). Applicants had until Thursday 10 June 2021 to reply to their offers, however, if they had not responded they would then be given a further 14 days to make their decision. Many universities had also signed up to allow changes after these additional 14 days.

Applicants who made an application after the 30 June 2021 would go straight into Clearing. Clearing Plus was currently open to universities and colleges to update their courses and would be open to applicants on the Monday 4 July 2021.

UCAS was currently preparing for Confirmation and Clearing and was working with over 35 different awarding organisations to ensure results were received in time. All four nations results day would be held on Tuesday 10 August 2021 this year.

Last year there were some initial issues with Track at 08:00. Despite UCAS testing Track to four times its previous years' load, the traffic was ten times the previous year and this resulted in Track running too slowly. UCAS was also considering implementing a 'waiting room' if the volume of logins became too much. The Group thought a waiting room idea was well received by the group but noted that the information provided in the waiting room needed to be carefully considered to ensure it didn't exacerbate anxious applicants.

It was confirmed that Track was used by applicants in the morning of results day to see whether they had been accepted into their firm or insurance university or whether they were in Clearing. In the afternoon Track would be used to add Clearing choices. Additionally, Track would also have a number of FAQs and signposting options if students had any questions, and they could also get some 'status codes' which they could use to open a student bank account as it would clarify them as a student.

UCAS would continue supporting students and working with the awarding organisations on their appeals process. Universities had been asked to wait until Wednesday 8 September 2021 before clearing academic conditions.

## **A2/21/06 Impact Covid has had on your studies**

The following questions were asked to the Group:

How had Covid-19 impacted their studies?

- There had been a lack of peer-to-peer support and informal learning conversations which students had missed. This had led to some learners feeling lonely.
- Practical courses had been affected, but so had courses which required field trips to gain additional skills, and those that required internships.
- It was easier for some courses to be transferred from classroom to home learning.
- Lecturers had found it difficult to distinguish which students were struggling during their lectures.
- Students hadn't been able to build a strong relationship with their lecturers.
- On a positive note, blended learning worked well for students with caring responsibilities and/or commuting students.

How did they feel about online learning?

- They liked the flexibility.
- Provided more flexibility for students with disabilities.
- It took students a bit of time to get used to it.
- It was a bit of trial and error to start with from both universities and learners.
- Some universities didn't record lectures.

- To begin with, universities were of the mindset that students would be back on campus quickly. The changing advice and mixed messages had caused additional anxiety.

If you were to give advice to students beginning their studies this year with a mixture of blended learning, what would your top tips be?

- Embrace all aspects of learning.
- Get up and get ready as you would if you were meeting in person.
- Take it as an opportunity to tailor your skill set.
- Ask for help and ask questions.

What support had universities been providing:

- Had an enhanced flexibility extenuating circumstances policy.
- Had access to money via the new hardship funds and Covid relief funds.
- Had been enhanced tutorial sessions to ensure learners were academically supportive.
- The Student Union had run a range of workshops including one of emotional resilience and mental self-defence.

## **A2/21/07 UCAS 2022 undergraduate application update**

The Group was asked to register an account with the UCAS hub and sign in, and 'start application' to create a dummy UCAS 2022 application so that they could see first-hand the changes which had been made.

Group  
SAG023

The Group was shown some slides on how to register for an account and what the application looked like. The Group was thanked for their feedback over the past 18 months on 2022 application and the Hub and the feedback had been taken into account when UCAS developed the products. UCAS would like to continue to use the Group to gain further feedback for future developments.

There was a conversation around where the disability information inputted into the application form goes. It was confirmed that there was a self-declaration section and UCAS would send the information to the provider so that they could reach out to students to ascertain additional support requirements if applicable. Although no supporting documentation could be uploaded to the application form, advisers could add supporting information in their reference. UCAS had also released a report on mental health awareness called '[Starting the Conversation](#)'.

It was asked whether a note could be added to say that by declaring disability information did not mean applicants were registered with the disability team within the universities or colleges. It was agreed that the help text under that section would be reviewed.

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Finally, it was confirmed that students could not view their reference in the application form, however some schools and colleges were now open with students about the reference. Of course, applicants could request a copy of their application from UCAS which will of course include their reference.

**A2/21/08 Any other business and Close**

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 20 October 2021.