minutes

UPAG/16/M3

UCAS Progress Advisory Group meeting

held on Tuesday 18 October 2016, 11:00 – 15:00, at UCAS, Cheltenham.

Chair:	David Brack	Head of EP Experience
Attendees:	Andy Fawcett	Greater Manchester LA
	Angela Barlow	ESSA Academy
	Barnaby Hall	South Essex College of Further & Higher Education
	Carl Birchall	The Manchester College (Openshaw campus)
	Sally Lowe	Leeds City Council LA
	Jayne Talbot	Ninestiles School
	Mike Raynor	Kent LA
	Sally Wilcher	The Harbour School
	Jamie Shackleton	Cambridge LA
	Lee Bryant	Drapers Academy
Apologies:	Carl Birchall	The Manchester College (Openshaw campus)
	Sally Lowe	Leeds City Council LA
UCAS in attendance:	Angharad Moran	Junior Web Content Editor (observing)
	Ange James	Business Customer Service Adviser
	Deniz Gosai	Groups and forums Administrator
	Emma Cole	Scheme Delivery Owner
	Fraser Nicoll	Strategic Product Manager
	Louise Greenway	Business Customer Service Adviser
	Matt Lannen	Relationship Manager (UCAS Progress)
	Sarah McDonnell	Data Collection Officer
	Sarah Derbyshire	Marketing Manager
	Susan Blackburn	Data Collection Assistant (observing)
	Tom Gromski	Technology Relationship Manager

A3/16/01 Welcome and apologies

David Brack, Head of EP Experience and Chair, welcomed the Group to the meeting. Each member introduced themselves, and the apologies were noted. It was confirmed that several members had resigned from the Group:

- Narinder Singh Lali, Roundhay All-through School Leeds
- Yvonne Lloyd, Churchdown School Gloucester
- Sharon Squires, Crown Hill Community College
- Sarah Sykes, Aston Academy Sheffield
- Nick Dale, Valley College, Doncaster

Lee Bryant, Drapers Academy, was welcomed as a new member.

A3/16/02 Minutes and action log from previous meeting

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

The action log was discussed:

Actions UPAG007 – UPAG011, UPAG015, UPAG017 and UPAG018 were closed prior to the meeting.

UPAG012 – it was confirmed that the percentages of satisfaction were:

- sending schools - 70%
- local authorities - 60%
- through schools – 53%
- receiving providers – 52%

This action was closed.

UPAG013, UPAG014 and UPAG016– would be updated during the meeting. These actions were closed.

UPAG019 – currently GCSE 9-1 had English literature, English language and mathematics on recommendation from the Policy Team. There was currently a free text space to enter mathematics higher or foundation, as required. The second phase would incorporate more subjects in the list. In UCAS Undergraduate Apply, the GCSE did not differentiate between higher and foundation at present. This action was closed.

A3/16/03 Update on UCAS Progress data reporting requirements

A presentation on operational reporting was shown to the Group, and a copy was sent with the minutes. It was explained that operational reporting would be at provider level. The local authorities would also like the reports to be at strategic/higher level, as well as course level.

The data reporting gathered at the last UCAS Progress Advisory Group meeting related to application data. It was explained that marketing data requirements would also be explored.

It was confirmed that 'destination' data would also link to where learners went post-16 (for example job, or university). The DfE had asked schools to report on NEET (not in employment, education or training) figures, which would be useful.

The Group agreed the timings of any reports would be essential, as out-of-date data would not be useful, and the data should start two levels above the provider-level (custom district and then local authorities).

Data required for marketing was discussed. This would be used for research, however the information was reliant on providers entering the correct information. Learners required guidance, and it would be useful if the marketing data could be tracked to individual students, so tailored advice could be given.

It was confirmed that, due to the Government's increased focus on apprenticeships, UCAS had made the decision to bring its work forward. The Group was shown the apprenticeship web content on www.ucas.com/ucas/16-18-choices/search-and-apply/apprenticeships/applying-apprenticeship. UCAS was working with the Skills Funding Agency, and hoped that to display all degree and higher level apprenticeships in England on ucas.com by 2017. This would expand to include the rest of the UK and other levels of apprenticeships over time.

The Group would encourage students to express an interest in apprenticeships, but would still encourage them to apply for other courses, in case they were not successful.

Jayne Talbot, Ninestiles School, agreed to send Fraser Nicoll a list of all the employers who contacted her regarding apprenticeship vacancies. Apprenticeships would also be an item on the next meeting's agenda.

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A3/16/04 UCAS Progress operational update

The running of the 2016 cycle went smoothly. There were a number of incidents early in the cycle, which caused outages resulting in learners being unable to submit applications. This was similar to the previous year.

From 5 - 7 October 2015, there had been an outage due to changes made to the UCAS firewall. UCAS decided to roll back the changes to resume services to customers, while IT teams continued implementing the changes without disruption to the schemes.

During January 2016, providers had tried to process large numbers of applications. Some experienced error messages and time-outs. During this time, applications were manually acknowledged, allowing the backlog to clear. This issue did not reoccur, and a permanent fix had been put in place to change the way the bulk acknowledgement feature worked.

Performance issues experienced between April and July 2016 prompted the decision to move UCAS Progress into Cloud technology, provided by Amazon Web Services. This was part of an initiative to make UCAS' core systems more sustainable, resilient and reliable.

There was an extremely large amount of learner, application and course data on the system which had been causing internal performance issues, particularly with access to the reports. UCAS Progress was moved to the Cloud at the beginning of October. To date, positive feedback had been received.

The changes to the 2016/17 scheme had been minimal. Issues were previously resolved regarding bulk acknowledgement, along with another issue affecting the adviser's applications view and the disappearance of search filters when using the multiple pages function.

There was an issue affecting the reference data which fed into the search tool, meaning that qualification (QAN) numbers could not be updated. The publicly available LARA database was being used. This then changed to the LARS database, so UCAS was changing its import facility, so QAN numbers could be updated. This had been prioritised, and was currently awaiting resource to begin the work. Initially, it was hoped that this would be in place at the start of the cycle, but unfortunately this had not been possible. It did, however, remain on the list of critical minor enhancements requiring work.

A new online searchable 'help system' had been created to assist administrators in using the site. This replaced the previous PDF versions of the manual, and could be updated instantly if required.

The Technical Relationship Management Team at UCAS had worked with a number of software vendors to improve the experience of UCAS Progress for its customers. Some of the vendors, including Compass, Civica, and Tribal, had built mechanisms for importing UCAS Progress application data into their own management information systems, for use with their already implemented software. This was a great improvement for these customers, and the team hoped to get similar agreements with the remaining software vendors.

UCAS would relaunch its project during this cycle, to provide support and advice to MIS managers in getting UCAS Progress data into in-house systems.

Statistics from the 2016 cycle were shared with the Group. They included:

- number of applications – 139,901 (10% increase from 2015)
- number of applicants – 64,688 (11% increase from 2015)
- average of 2.1 applications per applicant
- number of providers in the search tool – 3,291
- number of courses in the search tool – 14,4832

The Group was reminded of the 2017 cycle key dates:

- Friday 19 May 2017 – rollover (courses)
- Monday 2 October 2017 – rollover to the next cycle

There would be no changes to the other milestones in the cycle, such as the application auto-releases, or reports being available.

A3/16/05 Data collection update

5.1   DfE course database update

UCAS had tried to provide course data to the DfE, however due to a technical error which could not be overcome, was not able to do so. UCAS had, however, recently developed a new relationship with a post-16 lead at the DfE, and was meeting with them on 3 December 2016 to try and find a solution to minimise the workload. It was noted, however, that entering course data into UCAS Progress and the post-16 portal was optional.

The Group confirmed, that at present, it was not adding information into the portal, as it was too time-consuming. However, if it was to become mandatory, then providers would only update the portal, and not UCAS Progress. The Group asked if there were any statistics showing whether the number of courses added to UCAS Progress had decreased, compared to the same time last year. Concern was raised that if there were various places learners could access information, it could be confusing. UCAS was asked

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to investigate importing the data from the DfE portal. A further update would be provided at the next meeting.

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5.2 Quality of course rollover data

It was confirmed that the Data Collection Team (DCT) at UCAS could not upload courses to the DfE portal. However, the team could quality check course and provider information against the information on their websites. In addition, the DCT could export the information they held on UCAS Progress into an excel spreadsheet for providers to check, amend and return to the team for them to import back into the system, as could those providers who had logins. The team could also amend the information if providers sent them a prospectus.

The Group was also reminded that providers could use the UCAS Progress website to promote their information (through logos, videos etc.). Additionally, each year, DCT would ensure providers listed on the UCAS Progress website were still eligible to advertise their courses, and add those who were not advertising if they were eligible to do so. Information for this was gathered from the Association of Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges Association, and the Register of Training Organisations.

The Group asked if the rollover could be earlier (ideally by September), and if they could have the current list of courses and the new courses for the following year showing at the same time. It was agreed that Jamie Shackleton, Cambridge LA, and Andy Fawcett, Greater Manchester LA, would work with Matt Lannen, Relationship Manager, and Emma Cole, Scheme Delivery Owner, to establish the exact needs for this, to work out a solution. An update would be provided at the next meeting.

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A3/16/06 UCAS Progress satisfaction survey

The Group was shown a presentation about the UCAS Progress satisfaction survey, and a copy was sent with the minutes. It was confirmed that a message asking for members to join the UCAS Progress 'critical friends' group had been sent out in the newsletter. A further request for members would be sent out shortly, and final membership would be confirmed in November 2016. One area the critical friends would investigate first would be the complex passwords. A further update would be provided at the next meeting.

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A3/16/07 How can UCAS support UCAS Progress online?

Sarah Derbyshire, Marketing Manager, joined the meeting and asked the Group to answer a quick paper-based survey.

The local authority members of the Group confirmed they asked their schools to not read UCAS newsletters as some of the dates did not match with theirs, which caused

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confusion. UCAS would look into whether the local authorities could be given some wording to incorporate into their emails to schools.

The new UCAS Progress web pages were shown to the Group. A 'UCAS Progress advisers' tile could be find in the advisers' section at www.ucas.com/advisers?tile=tile-516, not at www.ucasprogress.com. The Group felt the new URL was causing confusion, and it was agreed that UCAS would consider setting up a redirect. UCAS would also investigate producing a widget for schools to add to their own websites, to help learners.

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A3/16/08 Any other business

There was no other business. The next meeting would be held on 7 February 2017. A calendar invite would be sent to the Group shortly.