

UCAS response to the Office for Students' Information, Advice, and Guidance Survey

Introduction

UCAS is an independent charity that provides the UK's national undergraduate admissions service. Every year, we help around 700,000 students apply for full-time undergraduate courses, at nearly 400 UK universities and colleges.

As a highly trusted, independent charity, UCAS aims to provide a complete support package for students, teachers, and parents, to help young people decide if higher education (HE) is right for them, and to guide them through every step of the admissions process. Our programme of 52 UK-wide exhibitions reaches an annual audience of around 170,000 students, and we work with a growing range of partners to offer engaging and relevant content to students and advisers, including case studies, blogs, vlogs, storytelling, and comprehensive step-by-step guides, through many different channels.

Our search tool allows students and advisers to explore and filter undergraduate, postgraduate, and conservatoire courses in one location. The tool links to relevant, key information and statistics for each course, and information about the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) ratings. In addition, our new, highly regarded apprenticeship hub allows students to explore the latest degree and higher apprenticeship opportunities.

We've recently embarked on a new project to take our information and advice service to the next level. Young people want, and need, more timely, tailored information and advice. Our new service, built on data-driven personalisation, will allow us to send and surface timely and bespoke information, supplied by industry experts, to inform post-18 choices.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Office for Students' (OfS) [overall proposed approach?](#)

UCAS shares the aim of helping all students – regardless of background – make well-informed choices about their futures. Our mission is to inspire and enable students to make these choices, through the timely provision of personalised information and advice. We know young people use a wide range of information sources to assist their HE decision-making. A joined up information and advice landscape is, therefore, of paramount importance.

However, while data and comparative statistics have a role to play, decisions about which subject to study – and especially where to study – are often emotionally motivated. We fully support the adoption of the Gatsby Career Benchmarks, and believe every young person should have access to the kind of high quality, one-to-one careers guidance that is the norm in the independent sector. So, while we share the OfS' ambition of supporting students in making informed choices, we would emphasise the role of the adviser in student decision-making. Our network of more than 500 secondary education providers makes us well placed to work with the OfS, and others, to reach this audience.

Choosing the right course at the right provider is a high stakes, high cost decision. Therefore, the suggestion that the OfS will work further with providers, to develop good practice in delivering information and advice to prospective students, is welcome. For example, our [Progression Pathways 2017](#) research shows that many older students are not aware of the full range of options open to them. UCAS provides specific information and advice for mature students on several topics, including meeting entry requirements, preparing for a return to study, financial issues, and case studies, but this kind of focused information is not always easy to find on providers' websites. This would build on the good work

that has already been done by providers, since the publication of the Competition and Markets Authority's advice in 2015.

UCAS already provides information and advice to support students who may be interested in transferring to a different course, and has recently been exploring how we might work with the Open University to further develop this content. Our new service will afford us the capability to surface this information at the appropriate point in a student's journey.

More broadly, UCAS has recently committed significant resource to enhancing the application services it already offers, to support students who may wish to switch courses, either voluntarily or otherwise. The intention is that this will be available for the 2020 entry cycle.

Are there other key potential partners we should work with? Who are these potential partners, and why should we work with them?

Given our trusted and independent brand, we believe UCAS is best placed to take the lead role in delivering engaging and personalised content. In line with the [CFE research](#), we acknowledge that students use a wide range of sources to inform their decision-making, and like to hear information 'from the horse's mouth'. That's why we're keen to work with providers, industry experts, and sector bodies to create a seamless experience for students.

For example, UCAS and the Student Loans Company (SLC) already work together to deliver a [student finance hub](#), which provides consistent and high quality information about the range of financial support available. However, our shared ambition is far greater, and we intend to work towards a position where a student's application to university or college is aligned to their funding application. This user experience will be underpinned by our shared understanding of how and when students begin to consider their support package, which we know is from an early age.

Do you have any other comments relating to these proposals?

UCAS' independence and brand mean students trust us to support them through their progression journey. In registering with UCAS, students create a profile, which will be enriched through insight gathered as a result of their behaviour and interactions on [ucas.com](#), as well as that informed by their research elsewhere. It is this student engagement that populates a personalised dashboard, which users will return to time and time again, as they research, shortlist courses, and, ultimately, submit their application.

We agree that the Unistats information can be useful to students, and we are keen to host such data, alongside our own insights from student surveys, as part of our service. For example, our own research tells us that applicants are interested in employability – graduate earning potential was identified in our 2017 student decisions report as the fourth most important factor when replying to offers, behind modules, student reviews, and location. However, we also support the findings of the CFE research, that 'there is no one-size-fits-all information solution – the outcomes of students' choices are inherently personal'. So, our ambition is that our service will only surface such datasets to applicants who the information is important for.

We're keen to continue our dialogue with the OfS, and to explore hosting the data currently held at Unistats to achieve this goal.