Minutes

USAG/19/M1

UCAS Student Advisory Group meeting

held on 13 February 2019 at UCAS, Cheltenham

Chair:	Courteney Sheppard	UCAS
Present:	Caitlin Woodland	University of South Wales
	Francesca Solomon	University of Bristol
	Gift Okafor	University of Gloucestershire
	Grace Cappy	Coventry University
	Harriet Swift	University of Nottingham
	Holly Hunt-Watts	Bath Spa University
	Katie Morton	University of Hertfordshire
	Risto Iyambo	University of Liverpool
	Ruth Carlson	University of Surrey
	Samantha Robson	London South Bank University
	Shaun Hiscox	University of South Wales
Guest:	Helen Parker	Teaching Excellence Framework Review
Apologies:	Sophia Moreau	Birkbeck College, University of London
UCAS in attendance:	Fiona Johnston	Director of Operations
	Fraser Nicoll	Strategic Product Manager (I&A lead)
	Kate Butland	Head of Policy and Strategy
	Kate Watson	Senior Marketing Manager
	Samantha Sheppard	Product Owner

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A1/18/01 Welcome and apologies

The Group was welcomed, and apologies were noted.

A1/18/02 Introduction to UCAS, history, and mission

The Group is currently incomplete in make-up, with no representation from Scotland or Northern Ireland. The Group will be chaired by a student who also sits on UCAS Council. For the purposes of this meeting, Courteney Sheppard (Business Owner) chaired the session.

One member of the Group is also on the OfS student panel.

A1/18/03 Terms of Reference review, group purpose

There was student interest in UCAS Media, specifically how it ensures there is fairness in the opportunities offered, in terms of spending power. The lottery system for Clearing was referenced, as well as close links to the Charity, to ensure fairness.

The Terms of Reference were still to be finalised, and would be published on ucas.com with minutes of the meeting.

A1/18/04 AMS demo and run-through

Almost all students had been contacted by providers directly alongside the UCAS process to confirm offers – mostly by email.

One student used Clearing – they felt it was stressful, but the process worked, and they were happy with the end result.

Unconditional offers were a topic of much debate, and varying scenarios were played out by students in terms of offers they'd received. The Group was broadly supportive of unconditional offers, if used in the right context. The Group certainly felt there was risk to Level 3 attainment if not used correctly.

The Group would discuss the effects of the embargo, and subsequent breaches, at the next meeting, to get a student perspective.   CS USAG01

UCAS took an action to ensure advisers had more and earlier access to how Extra and   CS USAG02
Clearing worked. The Group felt this was an area where they were (collectively) not supported enough.

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The Group discussed how students valued the option to have an insurance choice (within the confines of the current system). The reassurance that this additional option gave was clearly important when students were considering their options and making replies – most had two – four choices they really wanted to go to, and added additional choices at the suggestion of their teachers. The Group wanted UCAS to ensure clearer understanding of what the insurance choice meant, and how this could be consumed within the application management service (AMS).

A1/18/05 **Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) – Department for Education Independent Review**

Only half the students had heard of TEF, with none of the pre-higher education students knowing about it.

Those working in Student Union's had input into university submissions to TEF, so had a reasonable understanding of what it covered. Those who didn't, believed that TEF influenced the fees providers could charge.

Only one student (out of those who had heard of TEF), specifically used the TEF rating to make a decision on where to study.

Unprompted, most students felt TEF ratings at subject level would be more useful.

There was uncertainty as to what gold/silver/bronze represented, and what the differences were. The Group felt there needed to be greater transparency on this.

There was an assumption on the ratings that there would be better teaching/engagement/results – higher progression rates through the years of study, so lower drop-out rates. The Group believed this was incorporated into the rating system. The Group felt it was important that each provider clearly displayed what their TEF rating was on marketing collateral.

The Group felt there was not enough distance between the three rankings, and there should be a level lower than bronze. It was felt that there should be clear tracking when, and if, a provider improved or decreased their ranking, and why.

Suggestion of changing to 'Excellence Framework' as the teaching would not help their outcome. It was more likely to be participation of students in additional activity, or engagement in self-learning, that would impact their success and progression post-university. There was agreement that the title 'TEF' was not clear enough and, that is was misleading as to what it covered.

The Group raised a concern that the TEF ranking could potentially become another siloed approach to university rankings, similar to the Russell Group.

A1/18/06 Information and advice dashboard and discussion

The Group felt it was important to not take people down a specific route without allowing for a 'reset', and being able to start again, based on a change in interest or circumstances.

Transparency in the source data was very important, as this always needed to be clear.

The Group felt there was not enough provision for those with more specific needs, for example, childcare, disability requirements, or LGBT.

The Group was very pleased to see Higher National Diplomas featured in the qualifications listing.

There was a mixed response from the Group as to whether TEF ratings should be displayed within the service, or not.

An 'add to calendar' feature would be very useful.

The Group members were massive advocates of the personal statement tool, and many felt this would have been very beneficial for them when they applied.

Give students the ability to tell us if they know exactly what they want to do, so we can show them case studies, about what other students did, and what they do now.

When shown the prospective offer rates, the students said they'd be put off by applying to places where there would be a lower offer rate (in percentage form). However, the Group made a suggestion that this could be illustrated in ratio form, as opposed to percentage points.

The final suggestion was that there could be a budgetary filter, to cater for those wanting to search based on their financial situation.

A1/18/12 Any other business and close

The next meeting date was undecided, and would be circulated once confirmed.   CS USAG03

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