

**Careers advice, information, and
guidance inquiry - written evidence
by UCAS**

8 February 2016

Executive summary

- UCAS' mission is to inspire and facilitate progression in education through information and admissions services. Our Corporate Strategy 2015–2020 aims to put UCAS in a position to provide more and better services to learners, teachers, advisers, and higher education providers (HEPs).
- Educational progression routes are increasingly varied and likely to be impacted by qualification reforms. Given UCAS' reach with young people, parents and teachers we are well placed to play a pivotal role in ensuring that all young people are engaged in exploring their learning and career options, and that they are supported in making informed choices particularly at critical transition points at ages 16 and 18.
- Our data and analysis highlights key trends in progression to HE and, crucially, those areas where inequality persists, such as the widening gap in entry rates between men and women. Such inequalities demonstrate the need for high quality and targeted careers advice, information, and guidance.
- UCAS' information and advice service is evolving to inspire and clearly set education and training choices and decision making firmly in the context of careers and employment from year 10 onwards.
- UCAS is a strong advocate for collaboration to ensure its customers have access to expert information and advice. As such, we are undertaking a multitude of initiatives working with partners including the Career Development Institute (CDI), FutureLearn, Skills Funding Agency (SFA), National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), National Careers Service (NCS), Department for Education (DfE), and the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC).

Introduction

1. UCAS is an independent charity with a mission is to inspire and facilitate progression in education through information and admissions services. We are best known for running undergraduate admissions services to around 390 universities and colleges. In 2015 we handled over 2.8 million applications from over 700,000 students.
2. However, we're also highly committed, and strategically focused, to inspiring and facilitating educational progression in ways that go well beyond the undergraduate service.
3. We recognise that progression to HE is part of a continuum of progression in learning, and that there are many routes to HE, which may include an apprenticeship or employment, and that pathways are not always linear. Given our reach and engagement with young people, parents, teachers and advisers – and our relationships with universities and colleges - we are well-placed to help young people make well-informed choices about their education, particularly at key transition points at the ages of 16 and 18.
4. Specifically, we offer extensive information and advice about the full range of choices at 18 and detailed advice on making an application to higher education. Alongside this our newer UCAS Progress service offers students at schools and colleges in England and Wales access to a comprehensive search of the full range of post-16 learning opportunities (including vocational pathways, apprenticeships and work-based learning). The service currently covers over 120,000 courses, including the learning component of

15,000 apprenticeships. We also sign post to local information and advice resources and information hubs, where these exist.

5. Where schools are signed up, learners can also make applications to post-16 learning providers. The Progress service therefore supports young people making decisions about what and where to study after their GCSEs, irrespective of whether they are considering HE in the future.
6. UCAS analysis shows that in recent years, there has been a shift in the qualifications with which young people are applying to HE, with many more applying with vocational qualifications or combinations of academic and vocational qualifications. It is evident that these pathways are not well understood by learners, parents, teachers and advisers or HEPs and qualification reforms are likely to complicate this landscape further. UCAS has explored this issue in a new report on progression pathways, which describes the knowledge and skills acquired from taking different types of qualifications and how this feeds into a diversity of progression routes. Alongside this we have published video case studies outlining the key issues; and a learner tool to allow young people to consider which option may be best suited to them.
7. UCAS is seen by its school, college, university, and learner customers as a trusted and independent source of quality assured information and advice on the full range of education and training opportunities available. Our 2015 survey found that 92% of teachers and advisers are very or fairly satisfied with the information, advice, and resources on the UCAS website.¹
8. UCAS also has a central role in helping support teachers and advisers in their engagement with young people. To that end, our Professional Development Team offers a range of training opportunities to support the UCAS application process, through a portfolio of presentations, workshops, and blended learning programmes.

Trends in HE admissions – the careers information and advice challenge

9. UCAS is the trusted and authoritative source of intelligence about achievement, progression, and participation in education. Decisions made by learners at the critical post-16 and post-18 transition points inevitably impact career outcomes.
10. Our rich data illustrates key trends in entry to HE and those areas where progression challenges remain to enable others to develop and implement more targeted information and advice.

UCAS' information and advice strategy

11. UCAS' information and advice objective is to be the first and most trusted choice for high quality information and advice about progression through education and training, and into employment. Our service is evolving to inspire and clearly set education and training choices and decision making firmly in the context of careers and employment.

¹ UCAS adviser survey 2015

12. UCAS' information and advice is high quality and impartial, reflecting the different ages and transition points of learners, their starting points, preferences, profiles, and needs. All our content is produced to professional CEIAG standards.
13. UCAS is moving to the delivery of a personalised service for all learners, including those we do not currently reach. This includes all young people at the post-16 transition point, the approximate 60% of 18 year olds who do not enter HE, those looking for vocational and work-related destinations, and disadvantaged and non-traditional participants in HE and specialist training.
14. While UCAS' careers information and advice is primarily focused on learners, we are further extending the content, tools, and resources for teachers and advisers – from classroom resources and activities to use with learners, to advice, guides, case studies, and good practice on how they can support their learners.

Sector collaboration and partnership

15. UCAS partners and collaborates with experts and specialists (including employers, industry bodies and sector skills councils) to develop high quality content and services. This approach is supporting learners in making the right decisions for the right reasons, based on information and advice from the relevant individuals and experts.

Career Development Institute (CDI)

16. UCAS is working with the Career Development Institute (CDI) to collaborate on the development of quality CEIAG resources. The aim is to provide access to information, materials, tools, and training to:
 - help learners gain access to quality and validated CEIAG
 - support careers advisers to deliver better quality services
 - support teachers, who are not trained careers advisers but have the responsibility for delivering CEIAG
17. UCAS is ensuring the CDI has the best and most current information for their advisers to use at each transition point, but particularly for undergraduate applicants where there are significant changes taking places (i.e. the new UCAS Tariff, qualification reform, etc.). We are also providing a hub of trusted information for teachers and advisers who the CDI are quality assuring.

FutureLearn

18. UCAS is working with FutureLearn and other partners to develop Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). The first course is focused on broadening learners' aspirations, expanding their awareness of the wide range of subjects and course choices on offer, and supporting them in making informed choices. This learner MOOC will be paired with one for teachers and advisers to ensure a united approach.

Skills Funding Agency (SFA) /National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)

19. UCAS has been working closely with colleagues at the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to support the government's pledge to create three million apprenticeships by 2020. We are enhancing our information and advice to detail these alternative pathways, both in terms of further education (FE) choices and for higher and degree Apprenticeships.
20. UCAS also works with the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) during Clearing to ensure apprenticeship opportunities are explained to young people exploring their options through the Department for Education's funded Exam Results Helpline (ERH).

National Careers Service (NCS)

21. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) have a memorandum of understanding with UCAS to support the NCS. UCAS has worked with the NCS' national contact centre in Newcastle to train the those advisers who take calls from younger learners to enable them to use UCAS Progress information and advice pages and the search tool to support their calls and web chats.
22. There is a pilot project in flight to embed a link on UCAS Progress to the NCS web chat service, so students using UCAS Progress can obtain one-to-one guidance online.

UCAS and the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC)

23. UCAS has engaged with the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) to support their mandate to inspire young people and help them to prepare for, and take control of, their future. We have already supplied their team of enterprise advisers with access to our careers and employment information and advice to supplement their training materials.
24. UCAS will be offering bespoke training to the CEC's enterprise advisers in February 2016. These sessions will be designed to showcase how best to optimise UCAS' classroom resources, and also to increase added value by providing training on other topical issues for schools, such as the new Tariff and qualification reform.

UCAS and apprenticeships

25. UCAS recognises that there are many pathways to HE, including apprenticeships and employment, and that HE can take many forms.
26. UCAS supports apprentices in a number of ways. We provide information and advice for learners, teachers, and advisers about advanced and higher apprenticeships, signposting to third parties such as the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS). We also supply HEPs with detailed information about common apprenticeship frameworks to allow them to make more informed admissions decisions about applicants who have completed an apprenticeship.
27. UCAS Progress' search service, displays apprenticeship vacancies – predominantly at advanced level – alongside other educational choices. UCAS Progress is also running a pilot in Richmond, North Yorkshire, working with the local MP and his team to promote

employer-led apprenticeship opportunities for post-16 and post-18 learners. This initiative will start in spring 2016 and it is intended to be rolled out fully in time for the next academic year, starting in September 2016.

28. We are currently in discussions with colleagues from BIS about how advanced apprenticeships could be included in the new UCAS Tariff.
29. Higher apprenticeships will continue to grow and gain credibility as an alternative means of developing higher level skills. Ideally, we would like to enable learners to make applications for higher apprenticeships alongside applications for degree courses. Degree apprenticeship opportunities, if led by a HEP, can already be included in UCAS' course search. Therefore, we are now exploring ways to accelerate our IT service development to enable us to offer more agile, flexible admissions services to a wider community of learners and education providers.
30. We look forward to working with BIS (and corresponding bodies in the rest of the UK) in the future, as we develop an admissions service that can better accommodate higher apprenticeships.

UCAS and employers

31. The link between education, and careers and employment is critical. Moreover, in order to provide credible and relevant information and advice, employers must play a key role. With this in mind, UCAS' content and services are being designed to communicate the fundamental and specific connections between education and employment.
32. We are engaging with representatives of sector and industry bodies, such the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' (BIS) Industrial Strategy Boards, Sector Skill Councils, Business in the Community, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), and key employer bodies to source content about the sectors and industries, skills needs, and employer perspectives on current and future employment opportunities for young people. We are also sourcing employer profiles to reflect the range of businesses in the UK, and case studies from trainees and employees.
33. In addition, UCAS enables learner interaction with employers via its commercial subsidiary, UCAS Media. Our career finder tool allows learners to register, search, and apply for job opportunities via a link on the homepage of ucas.com. This includes employer-sponsored degrees, graduate roles, internships, apprenticeships, and school leaver opportunities. UCAS Media also participates in a variety of careers and graduate recruitment events each year. This provides employers with the opportunity to engage directly with young people to inform their career decision making, and to source recruits now and for the future.