



The Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak MP  
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Dear Chancellor,

Thank you for the opportunity to input into the 2021 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR).

UCAS supports around 700,000 students from over 200 countries and territories every year to apply for full-time undergraduate courses, at nearly 400 UK universities and colleges. As a highly trusted, independent charity, UCAS provides comprehensive information, advice, and content to students regarding the full range of post-secondary destinations, including apprenticeships, part-time study, and distance learning. Our submission sets out the areas in education and apprenticeships that we hope will be prioritised in the CSR to enable us to better meet our charitable objectives and level up opportunity for the students UCAS supports. **This submission makes no request for public funding for UCAS – we proudly continue to be a financially sustainable and independent charity.** Alongside the suggested 'action for government' in our submission, we set out how UCAS is already working to address the points raised with the sector and partners.

Our submission is made in the context of unprecedented demand for education and training. [Record numbers applying for full-time undergraduate study](#) (+4% on 2020) in addition to 1.35 million searches carried out on [UCAS' apprenticeships service](#), which helps students find jobs and degree/higher apprenticeships, during the past twelve months (+37% on 2020).

This rising demand is set to continue. UCAS projects the 2025 cycle to have almost one million applicants, which is almost 40% more than in 2020. About 50% of this increase will be attributable to a growth in demand from UK 18-year-olds (driven by both an increase in application rates and an increase in the population) with the remaining 50% driven by continued growth in mature and international demand. This presents challenges in accelerating progress in widening access and levelling-up which, after significant improvement, has [stalled](#) in recent years. The need to promote the full range of options to pupils is also clear, including T levels and Higher Technical Qualifications.

Therefore, there has never been a better time for government to invest in the UK's world-renowned education and training sector. UCAS, as the shared UK's admissions service, stands ready to work with partners to play its role in continuing to inspire hundreds of thousands of individuals to discover their future.

Our CSR submission covers the following priority areas:

- 1. Improving careers information, advice, and guidance;**
- 2. Boosting apprenticeships;**
- 3. Expanding access and levelling-up opportunity;**
- 4. Delivering on the government's commitment to admissions reform**
- 5. Achieving the ambition of the International Education Strategy**

Your officials can contact me and the UCAS team at any time to discuss any of these areas or request further detail.

Yours sincerely,



**Clare Marchant**  
**Chief Executive, UCAS**

Cc:

*The Rt Hon Simon Clarke MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury*

*The Rt Hon. Nadhim Zahawi MP, Secretary of State for Education*

Area	What is the problem we are trying to solve?	Action for government	Action for UCAS in partnership with the sector
<b>Careers information, advice &amp; guidance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UCAS' report, <a href="#">Where Next? What influences the choices school leavers make?</a>, shows one in three applicants report first thinking about higher education at primary school and that one in five students report they could not study a higher education subject that interested them because they did not have the relevant subjects for entry.</li> <li>Disadvantaged students are more likely to consider higher education later, which can limit their choices, especially for more selective subjects and higher tariff providers.</li> <li>Aspiration remains a considerable barrier for disadvantaged students in accessing higher education – in 2021, the 30 June application rate for POLAR4 Q1 UK 18 year old students was less than half that of POLAR Q5 (27% vs. 60%).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Prioritise embedding careers information, advice, and guidance within the curriculum in primary schools to facilitate the raising of aspirations at an earlier age.</b></li> <li><b>Fund the development of age-appropriate Gatsby Benchmarks for usage within primary schools to raise aspirations from an early age. A recognised framework could 'close the gap' before inequalities become entrenched and ensure consistency in implementation.</b></li> <li><b>Resource schools to deliver on these new information and advice statutory requirements within primary education, ensuring that these include the full range of pathways and careers.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate on a programme of targeted outreach work within primary schools and early secondary years with a focus on 'fixed' yet lesser-known subject areas (e.g. economics) to broaden awareness of different choices.</li> <li>Develop data tools to aid early secondary students' understanding of how qualification and subject choices at secondary school and post-16 may affect their later options.</li> <li>Work with the National Careers Service as a pillar of the government's ambition for skills and careers advice in England, acting as a delivery partner alongside the Careers and Enterprise Company, to ensure UCAS acts as a digital equaliser for information and advice.</li> </ul>
<b>Apprenticeships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UCAS' report, <a href="#">Where Next? What influences the choices school leavers make?</a> finds that almost one in three students report not receiving any information about apprenticeships from their school.</li> <li><a href="#">Where Next? Improving the Journey to Becoming an Apprentice</a> found almost a third (31%) of students said it was "very easy" to access information about higher education compared to just 6% who said the same about apprenticeships. More than one in five (21%) said it was "somewhat difficult" or "very difficult" to get information on apprenticeships.</li> <li>A recent UCAS <a href="#">survey of parents and carers</a> found that almost one in three were unaware that you can apply for a degree apprenticeship alongside an undergraduate application.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Invest in a national programme of Continuing Professional Development for teachers and advisers to update and expand their knowledge about apprenticeships and technical routes.</b></li> <li><b>Deliver on the government's commitment to "give more teeth" to the existing Baker Clause to ensure compliance. Consideration should be given to how to achieve this in consultation with schools, colleges, and information and advice providers, such as UCAS and partners.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Act as a 'digital Baker Clause', providing careers information and advice for the full range of choices. Achieving this would require an expansion of the comprehensive information, advice, and content tools already available through UCAS to help students make informed and aspirational choices about the full range of post-secondary options in a single location.</li> <li>Act as the gateway to all post-secondary opportunities, addressing fragmentation and ensuring that the 700,000 individuals that come to UCAS each year can access the full range of opportunities.</li> </ul>

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Widening access and levelling-up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis within <a href="#">UCAS' What happened to the COVID cohort?</a> report shows that post-secondary education places need to grow significantly to meet demand, with those from disadvantaged backgrounds more likely to miss out due to competition for places.</li> <li>• There is a gap between the demand for and supply of apprenticeships: over half of students looking to apply in 2022 <a href="#">told UCAS</a> they are interested in apprenticeships; however, ESFA's figures show only 4.2% (3.4k) of Level 4 and above apprenticeship starts are for people under 19.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• UCAS' report <a href="#">Starting the Conversation: student mental health</a>, shows a 450% increase in students declaring a mental health condition over the past decade.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ensure that the funding settlement arising from the CSR funds the growth in demand for post-secondary education places due to a growing 18-year-old population.</b></li> <li>• <b>Continue financial incentives (especially for smaller firms) to hire apprentices, making it a permanent feature of the education and training system, with consideration as to how to target these at school leavers.</b></li> <li>• <b>Ensure investment in services to support mental health matches the increased demand from young people, especially as we recover from the pandemic.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote UCAS' data service – <a href="#">STROBE</a> – which allows organisations such as the Brilliant Club to evaluate the effectiveness of their outreach and interventions.</li> <li>• Support organisations to communicate directly with disadvantaged students. This has been trialled with Brightside as a means of targeting students for mentoring. UCAS' new Access Programme will seek to upscale such activities.</li> <li>• Identify geographical hot and cold spots for student engagement, progression and intervention activities, informing the strategic approach to levelling-up both within and across regions.</li> <li>• Improve the collection and transparency of equalities data covering the full range of post-secondary choices, providing efficiency to the education and training sector.</li> </ul>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Admissions reform</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As shown in UCAS' <a href="#">consultation response</a> to the DfE Post-Qualification Admissions Reform consultation, whilst there could be a different way to manage admissions, a post-qualification model is not a quick fix for widening access and participation and levelling-up.</li> <li>• Other reforms that support fairness, transparency, and accessibility for students must be part of the solution also – a theme of feedback during UCAS' engagement to date and, most recently, our reform roundtable events.</li> <li>• Availability of support from schools and colleges before and during the application window will be critical to the success of any new model – UCAS' research finds 85% of students speak to their teachers about making university and college decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Provide additional funding to support external, independent information and advice, such as through the further roll-out of 'Careers Hubs' from the Careers and Enterprise Company in conjunction with Local Enterprise Partnerships.</b></li> <li>• <b>Additional investment in <a href="#">Career Leader</a> training that's targeted at areas of deprivation.</b></li> </ul> <p><b><u>If government proceeds with admissions reform:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Under a post-qualification model, students will expect and require more extensive support in the summer; therefore, schools will need to be resourced to support their students during the holiday period.</b></li> <li>• <b>Launch a multi-year fund to support transition towards a new admissions model to cover the costs to schools, colleges, and higher education providers of remodelling their systems and staffing patterns, both within admissions teams, and the staff required to support students post-enrolment (academically and pastorally). UCAS will continue to work with departmental officials to model the financial impact of reform.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with policy makers, stakeholders, and customers across the UK to invest in UCAS systems to enable post-qualification admissions reform to happen.</li> <li>• Continually innovate and reform UCAS products and services to improve the student journey.</li> <li>• Work with partners to better support part-time, credit-based modular study, and "micro-credentials" on the UCAS platform.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> [Apprenticeships and traineeships, Academic Year 2020/21 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

## International Education Strategy

- As of results day 2021, [a record number of students from outside the EU \(37,390, an increase of 9% on 2020\) have been placed at UK universities and colleges](#). There is notable growth in the number of placed applicants from many of the priority countries in the International Education Strategy, including Nigeria (+40%), India (+20%) and Indonesia (+17%).
- However, with the [56% decline in the number of placed EU applicants](#), the overall number of international applicants placed at UK universities and colleges on results day is at its lowest level since 2013.
- [UCAS is the single largest channel for international students entering UK study](#). Over the past decade, UCAS has helped 1.3 million students from over 200 countries and territories around the world secure their place in HE.
- **Linked to the [updated International Education Strategy](#), additional investment in current and future iterations of the GREAT campaign. This would be an opportunity to ensure centralisation and coordination of key messages related to the marketing of higher education.**
- **Include UCAS as a member of relevant government sector advisory groups (e.g., Department for International Trade (DIT)'s Education Sector Advisory Group) to support the growth of UK education exports.**
- Grow activities linked to the British Council and GREAT campaign to leverage UCAS' value add (e.g., direct channels to applicants and relationships with c.380 universities and colleges).
- Build on the recent success of the [Myriad by UCAS](#) platform, which allows postgraduate international students to search for information and advice, universities and colleges, courses and scholarships, to create a single gateway for postgraduate students looking to study in the UK.
- In the context of admissions reform, develop a personalised application route for international students, which could include better linkages with UKVI processes to enable a more efficient 'Student route' and 'Graduate route' visa application experience.