

UCAS response to the Department for Transport Call for Views and Ideas

Background

UCAS provides the UK's shared admission service, spanning tertiary education and apprenticeships to help 700,000 students to progress each year. As an independent charity, UCAS is the leading authority on student progression. Our retrospective and forecasting analysis, along with commitment to releasing eight million data points each year, play a vital role in informing the sector's understanding of student demand and behaviours. In addition, we are a student-centric organisation with unparalleled reach – ucas.com receives 30 million unique visits per year – and careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) expertise, which includes tools such as the Careers Quiz, where outcomes and skills data support decision-making, mean that we have the capability to support the Government and sector in addressing skills gaps.

UCAS is aiming to play a key role in influencing and, alongside partners, delivering the careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) landscape of the future. Equally, our commitment to fair access is increasingly seeing us explore the equality picture through a skills lens. As such, our primary interest is in two, key pillars: **promoting careers in transport** and **boosting diversity, inclusion, and social mobility across the transport sector**. Key points in our submission:

- **Our reach and expertise make UCAS key to promoting careers in transport:** UCAS is a trusted, free-to-access, personalised source of careers, information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) for 1.4 million school pupils and mature students researching their post-secondary options.
- **We are the gateway to c.150 transport apprenticeship opportunities:** UCAS aims to be 'route neutral' to ensure parity across all pathways including academic and technical routes such as apprenticeships, which are listed in UCAS' [Career Finder](#) service.
- **UCAS would welcome the opportunity to undertake research for the transport sector,** exploring the perceptions and behaviours of individuals that consider a career in transport. Our [Next Steps: Who are the 'future nurses'?](#) report is one example of how UCAS can work with industry partners to undertake research through a skills lens – such an approach, coupled with complementary marketing and media activities, would be beneficial to inform workforce planning activities in the transport sector.

We would welcome the opportunity to engage further with the Department for Transport as part of its [ongoing consultation](#) and dialogue with the education and training sector.

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UCAS is a trusted, free-to-access, personalised source of careers, information, advice, and guidance (CIAG), which makes UCAS key to promoting careers in transport

What is UCAS' reach in CIAG?

- **UCAS is a trusted, free-to-access, personalised source of information and advice for millions of school pupils and mature students.** Each year there are 30 million unique visits to ucas.com, with students exploring content on the full range of post-secondary options UK-wide, including technical education, apprenticeships, and flexible and lifelong learning. School leavers make up the most significant cohort of individuals applying through UCAS; however, in 2021 we supported 100,000 students aged over 25 take that next step in their educational journey. We are part of the government's Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) advisory group and are prioritising expanding our reach and impact in this area.
- **UCAS has a strong and continually growing relationship with employers** and has successfully adapted its expertise in course search development to create the 'Careers Finder' apprenticeships tool – this received a record 2.13 million searches in 2021, up 32% from 2020. Our most recent innovation includes apprentice-specific industry guides e.g., [transportation](#) and allows employers to create profiles on UCAS and showcase their offer to students. These include Jaguar Land Rover, Rolls Royce and Keir Group - some of the top apprentice employers for the transport sector in the country.
- **Our well-established relationships with more than 4,000 teachers and careers advisers** across the UK mean we can play a critical role in helping schools and colleges navigate a very complex landscape, ensuring that individuals make the right decision for them.
- **We are committed to providing first class services to the 380+ universities and colleges across the UK** who choose to use our application system.

How does UCAS deliver CIAG?

UCAS plays a central role as the most cited source for information for the 700,000 individuals researching their post-secondary options. Our dedicated customer-facing teams manage more than two million interactions each year and our in-house user experience function ensures that our products meet the needs of Generation Z, as well as being accessible for mature students and those with individual needs. Key activities include:

- [The UCAS Hub](#), our personalised information and advice dashboard, is the go-to place for students of all ages to explore the full range of post-secondary options. This covers different pathways to careers and video testimonials from working people on how they got into their profession. In a recent survey, 92% of students and 94% of advisers told us they used the UCAS Hub.
- A new [Careers Quiz](#) matches students to their best-suited career options and shows them the skills required, typical daily tasks and likely salaries. The quiz has already been used over 500,000 times since its launch in September 2021.
- [Peer-to-peer engagement](#), in partnership with Unibuddy, prospective applicants with current HE students to help them better understand course and campus options.
- [Discover Your Future Events programme](#), both physical and virtual, connects students, teachers and advisers with HE and FE providers, employers and support,

and outreach services. This includes the Apprenticeship Zone, where students can interact with top employers and discover the range of career options they could pursue.

- A growing library of [subject, career](#) – e.g. transportation and warehousing, construction, planning and the built environment –, and city guides, supported by labour market data, in recognition that student motivation to study is highly individual – whether that be salary, employability, or a healthy work/life balance. Page views for the subject guides are just over 3.5 million with the careers pages (live since September 2021) visited nearly 500,000 times.
- Adviser content, aligned to the Gatsby benchmarks, through our website, outlines information on the CIAG schools should be providing, shares suggestions of good practice, and offers tailored [guidance for parents and carers](#).

UCAS aims to be ‘route neutral’ and is the gateway to c.150 transport apprenticeship opportunities

Our objective is to build UCAS into a leading discovery brand, in line with our charitable mission, positioning ourselves as ‘route neutral’ to ensure parity across all pathways including academic and technical routes, including apprenticeships. We are always working to improve our offer:

- **Partnerships** will remain at the heart of our approach to CIAG as we build on existing relationships with the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC), National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), Gatsby Foundation, Careers and Development Institute (CDI) and other key organisations UK-wide.
- We are committed to working with school pupils **from a younger age**, engaging with those aged 13+ to inform and influence their decision-making. This aligns to our ambition to be the ‘[digital Baker Clause](#)’, right from the start, mindful that early engagement is key to opening doors.
- **Clearing Plus** is our data-led system that suggests courses to students based on their preferences and grades. This introduces students to opportunities, including apprenticeships, they may have previously considered out of reach
- Our central courses database is being enhanced to enable capture of a greater range of provision, including short courses and modules, allowing UCAS to support applications for **lifelong learning opportunities**, and powering the promotion of such opportunities to potential students.
- We are committed to **deepening the personalisation technology** within the UCAS Hub to support students with individual needs, and in recognition of their local context.

UCAS is maturing its approach to data and insights and would welcome the opportunity to undertake research for the transport sector

What does UCAS’ research and insight say about student decision making?

Over the past 12 months, UCAS has released a series of high-impact reports that shine a light on pertinent issues in education and skills. Our ‘Where Next?’ series examines how people make decisions about their future and the influence of these choices on what they do next – from GCSEs to employment.

[Where Next? What influences the choices school leavers make?](#) (March 2021) highlighted the importance of early engagement and careers advice. The research found:

- **Two in five** students said more information and advice would have helped them make better choices.
- Almost **one in three** said they **received no information about apprenticeships** from their school.
- When choosing their subject area, **over 50%** said that **high graduate employment rates had become more important** to them since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **One in three** students considered HE to be an option for them at **primary school**. However, **more advantaged students were 1.4 times more likely to do so** than their disadvantaged peers.
- **One in five** students said they could not study a HE subject that interested them because **they didn't have the right subjects for entry** – with medicine most commonly cited, highlighting the need for **early careers guidance** on how choices made at school can impact options later on.

[Where Next? Improving the journey to becoming an apprentice](#) (May 2021) focused specifically on apprenticeships, and found:

- **Over half of students looking to apply in 2022 told UCAS they are interested in apprenticeships**, but many find it hard to get the information they need about this pathway.
- **Only 8% of people associated apprenticeships with leading to a good job**. The word 'prestigious' was more associated with university degrees (76%) than apprenticeships (4%).
- Previous UCAS research found **89% of students said it would be useful to have a centralised platform** that offers a help/advice service when it comes to finding and applying for apprenticeships.

[Where next? Who doesn't plan to start a full-time undergraduate degree in autumn](#) (August 2021) found that of those not intending to start a full-time undergraduate degree in the autumn:

- Nearly three quarters (74%) had received information about undergraduate studies, while **just over half (53%) received information about higher or degree level apprenticeships**. Most wanted additional information about gap years (37%) and employment (35%).
- **Just 11% say they had received enough CIAG** and did not require any more, while **9% state they did not receive any at all**.
- **58% of white respondents** reported having received information about apprenticeships, compared to **only 45% of those from an ethnic minority group**.

What does UCAS' research say about skills?

Most recently, UCAS, in partnership with Health Education England (HEE), published [Next Steps: Who are the 'future nurses'?](#) The report paints a picture of the next generation of nurses who have been inspired by the pandemic. It finds:

- COVID inspires the next generation of nurses: The pandemic inspired more than two-thirds (69%) of 2021 nursing applicants to apply, with around one in ten stating it was the most important factor.
- Younger applicants find value in nursing: Numbers of 18 year olds applying to nursing in 2021 are up 38% relative to 2019, translating into an increase in acceptances of 43%.

- More geographically mobile ‘future nurses’ start their training: Driven by the increase in younger applicants to nursing, there was a 51% uplift in aspiring nurses starting courses outside an hour and a half radius from home. This has the potential to address geographic ‘cold spots’.
- Nursing applicants are extremely confident in their choice of career: 99% of 2021 nursing applicants are confident they have made the right decision to study nursing.

The report also explores the equality picture for nursing. On the one hand, we find that there is a ‘positive equality gap’ - nursing joins education and health and social care courses as one of only three subjects where more young people from the most disadvantaged areas in the UK choose to study nursing than their most advantaged counterparts. However, on the other, the gender gap remains stark with women more than 9 times more likely to choose and be placed on nursing courses. The application gap rises to 57 times more likely for children’s nursing course.

Working with policy makers to support workforce planning

The [Next Steps: Who are the ‘future nurses’?](#) report will be influential in informing UCAS’ broader partnership work with the NHS. For the last four years, UCAS been heavily involved with the ‘We are the NHS’ campaign working both directly with the client and their marketing agency. As a result of the campaign, nursing applications have risen from a **10%** up lift in the first year to a **30%** uplift last year – we are now branching out to help with applications for other healthcare subjects.

We’ve done this through a replicable campaign which took the following form:

- Insight and research – Use of insight surveys, focus groups and one-to-one interviews, as well as broader research reports such as the landmark piece discussed above.
- Audience identification – The identification of audiences to target including ‘subject crossover’ i.e., those subjects where we see a correlation with nursing.
- Media campaign – Use of traditional display media, email, social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok), in addition to new formats such as Facebook LIVE broadcasts and social filming.
- Reporting & Attribution – Proving return-on-investment by attributing demand to the campaign.

Our work with the NHS is one example of how UCAS can support industry and policy makers in addressing skills gaps and shortages. UCAS would welcome the opportunity to replicate such research for the transport sector, exploring the perceptions and behaviours of individuals that consider a career in transport.