

UCAS response to the Department for Education's access to schools for education and training providers consultation

Introduction

As a trusted, independent charity, UCAS is the go-to place for students and their advisers to understand the full range of post-secondary choices. Our mission is to establish UCAS as a leading discovery brand, positioning ourselves as 'route neutral' to ensure clarity and parity across academic and technical routes, including apprenticeships. We have an established apprenticeship offer for prospective apprentices, including through our tool – [Career Finder](#) – which matches applicants to employers. The tool received 2.14 million searches in the last 12 months, resulting in 243,000 leads being generated. As such, we are seeking to empower people to discover the next step on their education journey by providing accessible and inspirational careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) across all pathways, including apprenticeships, technical education, lifelong learning, and flexible/part-time options.

UCAS has significant reach with students and their advisers, working with a network over 4,500 teachers and advisers in schools and colleges across the UK and gaining approximately 30 million visits to UCAS.com every year. We aim to play a central role in influencing and, alongside partners, delivering the technical education and apprenticeship landscape of the future.

It is our insight and understanding of the student mindset which underpins our response here, and which we were pleased to see referenced in the Government's consultation and guidance. Our evidence is limited to those areas where our analysis and insight is most relevant and impactful. Going forward, we would also welcome conversations with the Department for Education and Ofsted as to how schools could be supported by UCAS in meeting their new obligations.

Key points

- **Technical pathways need to be presented alongside academic options to guarantee that students from all backgrounds are making the right decisions for them.** Research from our report "[Where Next? What influences the choices that school leavers make?](#)" found that disadvantaged students are more likely to consider HE later than their more advantaged peers, so presenting both routes side-by-side is critical in confirming that young people aren't limiting their choices for the future. UCAS therefore seeks to position ourselves as 'route neutral', providing parity in how we display options to students.
- **Tailored information, advice and guidance needs to be given to parents and guardians to help them understand apprenticeships.** Our analysis reveals that this group struggles to understand how apprenticeships can be

applied for alongside other routes. Of the 46% of students we surveyed who said they weren't considering doing an apprenticeship, half of them indicated that they did not know enough to make an informed decision. We recognise students receive information and advice about careers from many different sources, and utilise communication channels specifically targeted towards parents and guardians including a regular newsletter.

- **UCAS is continually developing our services to connect students, advisers, and technical education and apprenticeship providers in innovative ways.** Alongside our personalised digital products such as the 'Career Finder' tool and UCAS Hub which connect students to opportunities, our 'Discover Your Future' Events programme offers students an engaging, high-quality experience where they can meet with providers and employers offering technical education. These developments are part of our commitment to act as a 'digital Baker Clause', providing information, advice, and content tools to help students make informed and aspirational choices about the full range of post-secondary options in a single location. In the future, we aim to strengthen our offer by ensuring that all employers list apprenticeship vacancies through UCAS.

What does UCAS' research and insight say about student decision making on technical options and/or apprenticeships?

We were encouraged to see that the Government highlighted several of the key findings on apprenticeships and student choice from our 'Where Next' series in their consultation and guidance:

- **Almost one in three young people said they did not receive any information about apprenticeships from their school, and two in five young people reported that more information and guidance would have led to them making better choices** (["Where Next? What influences the choices school leavers make?"](#))
- **Over half of pupils looking to apply in 2022 told UCAS they are interested in apprenticeships, but many find it hard to get the information they need about them, and only 8% associated apprenticeships with leading to a good job** (["Where Next? Improving the journey to becoming an apprentice"](#))

We wanted to use this opportunity to highlight further findings from our research, which will support Government in providing guidance to schools and providers:

- When asked what was important to them when **looking for an apprenticeship, students most frequently rated the following factors as extremely important or important – training and development (95%), long term career prospects or job security (92%), and health and wellbeing support (83%)**. Alongside these factors, our 2021 careers survey for prospective applicants also indicated that students would find it useful to see the starting salary and a clear description of what learning or training at the provider will consist of from employers.

- **Parents and guardians need more support to understand different post-secondary routes:** Our research in “[Where Next? Improving the journey to becoming an apprentice](#)” found that almost one in three parents or guardians were unaware that you can apply for degree apprenticeships alongside an undergraduate application. Almost half (45%) of students reported that they had not discussed doing an apprenticeship with their parents or guardians in our 2021 careers survey.
- **Information about apprenticeships needs to be presented equally to all students:** 58% of White respondents reported having received information about apprenticeships, compared to only 45% of those from an ethnic minority group (“[Where Next? Who doesn't plan to start a full-time undergraduate degree in autumn?](#)”). Our 2022 pre-applicant survey data found that only 27% of female applicants have been given information about doing apprenticeships and encouraged them to consider all their options, in comparison to 35% of male applicants.

UCAS is well-positioned to partner with schools and colleges to deliver careers information for technical routes

Our research has found that UCAS was the most cited source of information for applicants across both higher education and apprenticeships (“[Where Next? Improving the journey to becoming an apprentice](#)”). Our existing reach means that we can assist students and advisers to understand the new statutory guidance, and to make sure that those applying for technical education and apprenticeships are supported to make informed choices. Our key activities to support this include:

- The [UCAS Hub](#), our **personalised information and advice dashboard where students can view both academic and technical routes side by side**. The Hub delivers content to students based on their circumstances and preferences and is already widely used, with 92% of students reporting using it in a recent survey.
- **Working closely with employers to showcase their apprenticeship offers to students.** The ‘[Career Finder](#)’ tool allows employers to advertise apprenticeships alongside graduate roles, which has been used more than 2 million times in the last 12 months. We now have apprentice-specific industry guides, which allow employers to create profiles on UCAS and clearly articulate what they offer to students. These now include Jaguar Land Rover, Vodafone, Rolls Royce, and Sky.
- **Our links with more than 4,000 teachers and careers advisers across the UK, and specific adviser content.** We provide a well-rounded package of support to advisers through regular updates and specifically tailored content for parents and guardians which are aligned to the Gatsby benchmarks.
- Our [Careers Quiz](#) **matches students to their best-suited career options** and includes both academic and technical pathways. Students can view the skills required, typical daily tasks and likely salaries of different careers. The quiz has already been used over 1 million times since its launch in September 2021.

- **We work with a range of partners with similar goals.** Through our existing relationships with key organisations such as The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC), National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), Gatsby Foundation, and Careers and Development Institute (CDI) we seek to add value to one another's work and act collaboratively to ensure that students can make the most informed decisions. Developing this network will support consistency across the sector, supporting schools and colleges to access high quality guidance on apprenticeships and technical education for their pupils.
- **Our extensive exhibitions and events programme allows students to find out more about academic and technical routes side by side.** As developed in more detail below, our events allow students to meet universities, colleges, apprenticeship providers and employers to enable them to connect with the right pathway for them.

Examples of good practice in provider access – our 'Discover Your Future' Events programme

We wanted to provide more information on our 'Discover Your Future' Events programme as an example of good practice in accessing education and training providers. Our recent series has been held in person and virtually, and allows further education, apprenticeship providers, and employers to communicate directly with students (and their advisers) about their options after pursuing a technical pathway. These events offer a wide range of activities including live application clinics, course and career taster sessions, and The Apprenticeship Zone, where students can interact with employers and discover the range of career options they could pursue. Crucially, these events provide expert guidance on how to research and make choices by presenting technical pathways alongside the option to go onto higher education. Our research into what determines the choices that school leavers make found that disadvantaged students are more likely to consider higher education later. Allowing students to see the full range of post-secondary options concurrently and in one location is therefore critical in maintaining the high quality of these events.

Appetite for our events is clear. Our UCAS Discovery Birmingham event, held in May, had around 10,000 people in attendance, on par with pre-pandemic levels, and 90% of every one of our target audiences rated the event as good or great when surveyed. To date, this year, we have now run 28 events, reaching almost 120,000 participants and plan to run an even bigger series next year.