

ACADEMIC REGISTRARS' COUNCIL
ADMISSIONS PRACTITIONERS' GROUP

The sixty-second meeting of the ARC Admissions Practitioners' Group will be held at
11am on Friday 12 June 2015

Woburn House, 20 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9HQ:
<http://www.woburnhouse.co.uk/about-us/transport.aspx>

Tea/coffee will be available from 10.30 am; a light sandwich lunch will also be available.

Members are asked to bring their institutional name badges with them to the meeting.

www.arc.ac.uk

AGENDA

1) Welcome To welcome any new members to their first meeting.	(11.00am)
2) Apologies for Absence Apologies are recorded on the attendance sheet.	
3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting To receive and approve the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 13 February 2015 (APG/15/07).	(11.05am)
4) Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda To discuss any matters not arising elsewhere on the agenda.	
5) SPA Update To receive a SPA report on current activities (APG/15/08).	(11.10am)
6) UCAS admissions cycle update To receive an update from UCAS (APG/15/09).	(11.35am)
7) Confirmation decision making timescales To receive a presentation on confirmation decision making at two member HEIs (APG/15/10 – to follow after meeting).	(12.30pm)
-- Lunch --	(1.00pm)

*****Confidential – for HEI representatives only*****

9) Confirmation decision making timescales Discussion about confirmation decision making timescales	(1.45pm)
10) UCAS Change Steering Group To receive a report on the agenda for the next meeting to be held on 15 June 2015.	(2.15pm)
11) UCAS Groups To receive updates from UCAS Groups (APG/15/11)	(2.30pm)
12) Potential discussion items (if not covered above), dependent on time: UCAS use of undergraduate course data Use of Tariff points in Course Search Feedback from members on new UKVI Biometric arrangements Feedback from members on acceptability of IELTS for visa purposes	(2.45pm)
13) Any Other Business Any substantial items should, if possible, be notified to the Secretary (richard.emborg@durham.ac.uk) in advance of the meeting.	
13) Dates of Future Meetings Friday 6 November 2015 (Woburn House, London) Friday 12 February 2016 (Woburn House, London) Friday 10 June 2016 (Leeds, venue tbc)	(3.30pm) (Close)

Academic Registrars Council

Admissions Practitioners Group

Minutes of the Sixty-Second Meeting

Dalton Ellis Hall, University of Manchester, Manchester

Friday 13 February 2015

Present: Martyn Annis (Chair, University of Brighton), Richard Emborg (Secretary, Durham University), Alan Paull (APS), Sue Metcalfe (Anglia Ruskin University), John Slater (Canterbury Christ Church University), Michelle Davis (Coventry University), Becky Hill (Coventry University London Campus), Philip Bailey (Cranfield University), Jo MacDonald (De Montford University), Liz Dodds (Durham University), Anne Wilson (Edge Hill University), Andy Homer (Kingston University), Stewart Harper (Leeds Beckett University), Mark Fry (Liverpool Hope University), Wendy James (London Metropolitan University), Dave Norton (Loughborough University), Peter Derrick (Middlesex University), Sarah Cullen (Newcastle University), Miriam Clift (Northumbria University), Alison Wilde (Nottingham Trent University), Jennifer Dwyer (Queen's University Belfast), Gen Rodriguez (Royal Veterinary College), Nicola Rawlins (Sheffield Hallam University), Janet Graham (SPA), Linda Burgess (Staffordshire University), David Brack (UCAS), Chris Wallace (UCAS), Alistair Sanderson (UCAS), Bella Malins (UCL), Andrew Earland (University of Bedfordshire), Joanna Labudek (University of Birmingham), Joanne Bainbridge (University of Brighton), Helen Reed (University of Cambridge), Alix Delany (University of East Anglia), Sally Rutterford (University of Exeter), Graham Rees (University of Leeds), Jenny Dnes (University of Leicester), Caroline Connell (University of Lincoln), Catherine Schofield (University of Manchester), Haf Merrifield (University of Nottingham), Peter Franklin (University of Oxford), Christine Giles (University of Portsmouth), James Ackroyd (University of Reading), Victoria Davies (University of Roehampton), Liz Hunt (University of Sheffield), Katie Salt (University of Surrey), Rob Evans (University of Sussex), Kerry Fey (University of West of England, Bristol), Julie Fothergill (University of Westminster), Karen Pendlebury (University of Winchester), Stacy Lloyd (York St John University).

Apologies: Julie Adams (Aston University), Kath Lloyd Clark (University of Bath), Simon Ells (Birmingham City University), Mel Peter (Imperial College, London), Jo Ladwa (Keele University), Jeremy Rowe (London South Bank University), Joanne Tallentire (Queen Mary, University of London), Sue Gemmill (Royal Holloway), Keran Williams (Swansea University), Gurjit Nijjar (University of Derby), Shane Collins (University of Dundee), Mandy Chetham (University of Essex), Jenny Ventris (University of Hertfordshire), Judith Davison (University of Huddersfield), Edith Wilson (University of Sunderland), Sarah Sims (University of the Creative Arts), Alistair Garmendia (University of Winchester)

15.01 Welcome to New Members

The Chair welcomed all new members to their first meeting, who were invited to identify themselves.

15.02 Apologies for absence

Noted from seventeen institutions.

15.03 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2014 were approved as an accurate record (APG/14/22).

15.04 Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

a) Other matters

Carried forward: the Chair of ARC APG to ask the Chair of PAG if UKPASS statistics could be circulated more widely.

Action: Chair of ARC APG

b) UCAS Advisory Group Reports

Carried forward: updates from all relevant UCAS advisory groups to be received by ARC APG.

Action: Secretary of ARC APG

15.05 SPA presentation on Consumer Law and admissions

Received: a presentation from the Director of SPA on consumer law and admissions (distributed afterwards as APG/15/04).

Noted and discussed:

- A caveat that SPA cannot offer legal advice and institutions should take their own legal advice.
- The guidance SPA is sharing is based on the draft advice for HE from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).
- The Office for Fair Trading reported on non-academic debt and academic sanctions in February 2014. The CMA draft advice followed up on this in November 2014.
- The consumer protection legislation that HE is now expected to adhere to is existing law and is UK wide.
- The CMA consider that the relationship between an HEI and a student is unfairly balanced in favour of the HEI, and that the scale of personal investment by the student since 2012 defines the relationship as a commercial one with the student as a consumer. The legislation seeks to balance the relationship.
- Consumer Protection Law will generally apply to the relationship between HE providers and undergraduate students in all parts of the UK.
- There are penalties for non-compliance.
- The key areas that are covered by the legislation are information provision, terms and conditions and complaints handling processes and practices.
- Further consideration is required over the description of information that may legitimately change during a course of a student's application and degree study.

- Under the regulations the CMAs view is that there are two contracts: at the offer stage (an option to buy) and at enrolment (a contract for educational services).
- The regulations cover the confirmation, clearing and adjustment stage and in particular HEIs should not engage in practices that could be seen as exploiting the extra time pressures associated with this period to pressurise applicants into making a decision.
- A criticising Which report in February 2015 on university's rights to change conditions after enrolment.
- Although not explicitly referred to in the CMA guidance, institutions should consider the value of adhering to the regulations for postgraduate and part-time study.
- A particular challenge will be in ensuring consistency of information provision across an institution.
- The Consumer Right Act that is due to come into force later in 2015 is likely to confirm the regulations and may add more.
- Members are recommended to consider the finalised advice when it is published with colleagues in registry, their registrar (or equivalent) and to contact their legal advisers.
- Terms and conditions are often similar between institutions as we share good practice.

Queried: the implications of practices that are required by external bodies such as the Home Office (regarding visas) or accrediting organisations. SPA will raise this with UUK.

15.06 SPA Update

Received: an update from the Director of SPA on SPA activity (APG/15/01).

Noted:

- Further work on contextualised admissions is likely. A short survey will be circulated in February 2015, which is likely to include some questions from HEDIIP about what information HEIs would want and how it will be provided. Members are encouraged to complete the survey.
- There has been an enthusiastic response to the SPA e-toolkit for good practice. Feedback suggests it will be especially useful for new staff or those wanting a refresh of their knowledge.
- SPA convenes an AUA/SPA applicant experience network. This will be meeting in March discussing what it means to be a professional in admissions.
- Thanks were given to those members who responded to the survey and/or interviews as part of the SPA Review.
- The value of SPA as a body to comment on behalf of the sector.

15.07 UCAS Update

Received: a UCAS update from the Head of Relationship Management and Head of Product Management (APG/15/02 and APG/15/05).

- a) Digital acceleration update (Head of Product Management)

Noted:

- The reasons for the need to rebuild IT infrastructure were noted.
- Plan to recruit up to 10 new development teams (3x current capacity).
- UCAS will start building from new rather than changing current (e.g. Collect, Apply, Search etc.).
- Need to break rebuild down into manageable chunks.
- First area = postgraduate. This is to manage the risk (core products would present too high a risk). By building at postgraduate with a smaller customer base that UCAS considers very similar to undergraduate, UCAS believe they can develop the system without jeopardising the core business. The intention is to deliver new postgraduate services by June 2016 (new Search, Collect, Apply and distribution of data services). June 2016 marks the end of UCAS's Graduate Prospects contract which provides UCAS with data. Developments will include consultation from day 1. HEIs are requested to trust UCAS that addressing postgraduate systems first is the right decision.
- Consequently there will be no more Courses improvements for some time. The current system will be remain until at least 2017 entry cycle. In time, Course Collect and Search will be rebuilt.
- UCAS need to ask the right questions to get the right design of the system.
- UCAS believe that the strengthened UCAS Groups and Forums will benefit the developments.
- A plea to use the Annual Conference as a key source to capture views, comments and feedback. There was the promise of a participatory main business session.

Queried:

- Is there capacity amongst members for user testing? It was confirmed that only 17 users will be involved in the postgraduate testing.
- Will a proper test environment that is well structured be provided?
- Concern was raised that experiences of the Courses products suggest that front-line staff at UCAS did not always understand how the system was set up and/or didn't understand what the issue was. So as well as having HEIs engaging with the testing it was important to have people at UCAS who understand the process. It was stated that the staff resource has been increased by three to four times compared to that devoted to Course Collect, including staff from the user experience, product management and relationship management teams.
- A suggestion was made to set up secondments from universities to bring the knowledge in to UCAS.
- How will the new work be funded? It will be from UCAS funds and won't be an additional charge to universities. The current capitation fee increase is to address the current deficit and not to fund additional work.

b) Feedback Annual Review Meeting 2014

Noted and discussed:

- Feedback and planned changes for the 2015 meeting.

c) International Admissions Review

Noted and discussed:

- Digital acceleration is mindful of the outcomes of the Review.

- Timelines are uncertain.
- Some proposals require more discussion as there was not sufficient consensus on some of the suggestions. The IAR was an early view gathering exercise rather than to make final decisions, and some proposals may not receive enough support to take forward.
- Any change like this will be referred by Change Steering Group, who will direct the issue to the relevant UCAS Advisory Group.
- It was suggested that developments should remain focussed on what was requested.

d) Admissions Conference 2015

Noted and discussed:

- The intention that the Conference should be practitioner led, especially with HEI-led breakout sessions.
- The Chair of SEAG will talk about HE admissions from school perspective.
- A request was made for papers in advance so members can raise queries and discuss within their institutions, thereby making best use of the Conference.
- A suggestion was made that future Conferences should include longer sessions where delegates can explore and discuss issues in detail.

e) 2014 end of cycle

Noted:

- A return to pre-2012 environment numbers.
- There are strong signs of a market operating, with HEIs having to work harder to recruit students evidenced through entry requirement fluctuations, offer making practices, bolder and savvier applicants.

f) 2015 cycle

Noted:

- In the final week before the 15 January deadline applications increased to +2% more than the previous cycle (+1% not counting Scotland teacher training).

g) OfferME or PlaceMe (applicant matching service)

Noted:

- UCAS is further developing targeted marketing to target unplaced applicants with vacancies.
- Will now sit within UCAS and not UCAS Media.
- Clearing Working Group have not supported the introduction this year and recommend any introduction should be in the form of a pilot to run until the outcomes of the Clearing Working Group are implemented
- UCAS will reflect on the concerns raised and recommendations made.

15.08 HECoS

Received: A presentation from Alan Paull concerning the New Subject Coding Project, run by CETIS (APG/15/06). The new coding is called the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS) scheme.

Noted:

- Feedback from HEI staff is vital. There are many chances for feedback.
- Currently in Stage 2 of project (since October 2014) = drawing up recommendations for a governance model.
- Stage 1 involved getting views of stakeholders who use HE data – see slide on Methodology. Two straw man prototypes: one concerning modest change and one with more radical change. Most important design principle = backwards compatibility with JACS, but also straightforward process.
- Stage 1 report can be found on the HEDIIP website.
- New scheme takes a broad view – wider than JACS, e.g. interface with research councils and research information.
- The new scheme is intended to deliver better usability and accuracy, better flow, better quality, less effort and less cost.
- Areas of conflict include not just HESA returns, but wider usage e.g. NHS workforce planning.
- Stage 2: support to policy implementation is very important as it is a way to support policy development.
- HECoS will not have a standardised coding system e.g. JACS code V100 = History. The code will be randomly created.
- HECoS is a flat list of terms whereas JACS is hierarchical.
- Navigation groupings are aimed to help with finding programmes.
- Aggregation groupings will be published, but UCAS aggregation may differ from HESA aggregation.
- Examples given in the slides are to give an idea of how aggregation may differ.
- Extensive public consultation from February to May 2015. Individual and institutional/organisational responses are requested.
- Another HEDIIP project is looking at data quality in HE.
- There needs to be a communication plan for HEIs to help academic staff understand the changes. Academic staff are often wedded to certain categories/classifications. Part of the public consultation is to engage with existing bodies and individuals in the academic community.

Queried:

- How is the project engaging with UCAS and HEFCE? Meeting with them to test coding with them, also some webinars.
- Is *J any use under the new system?
- Question about aggregating in HECoS for NSS so as to not identify individuals. Part of the project includes being transparent about how things are aggregated. This does mean that where not enough students provide responses in NSS, aggregation would be used. HESA returns and UCAS time series will have to be aggregated. The aggregation for each doesn't have to be the same but the methodology for aggregation has to be clear.

Confidential Discussion (for HEI representatives only)

15.10 Feedback from UCAS Council

Received: an update from the Chair of ARC APG on UCAS Council

Noted:

- UCAS Council is becoming a sense check for UCAS Board.
- UCAS Council has been asked to look at UCAS's 5 Year Strategy (already agreed by the Board) to identify key risks. At the heart of the Strategy is the learner journey. UCAS has ambitions to reach further back, e.g. younger age groups, and to expand.
- UCAS Council has stated it is essential that UCAS continues to delivery a primary objective of core admissions process. In reality, the changes in undergraduate will be significant and will overshadow everything.
- UCAS Council has asked how UCAS can help with efficiencies in HEIs since there will be value in this.
- UCAS Council was asked to consider a proposition to release more information on institutions, including how many students were recruited through Clearing. UCAS Council objected, so UCAS will not progress with this.

15.11 Feedback from potential ARC APG Secondary Education Group

Received: an update from the Chair of ARC APG on developments to date

Noted:

- School and College representatives are eager to have regular meetings with a group of admissions practitioners.
- Exploratory meetings are taking place with the GSA HMC universities committee (already met) and ASCL to agree how this might work in practice.
- Most likely this will involve meeting once a year with perhaps 12 school and college representative and 12 representatives from ARC APG.
- The Chair will keep members updated on developments.

15.12 Feedback from ARC Admissions Subgroup

Received: an update from the Chair of ARC APG on the Subgroup

Noted:

- The background of the Group was discussed. UCAS received complaints from member HEIs about rule breaking. Following advice UCAS have passed the issue to ARC for the sector to consider the issue. ARC Executive has tasked a Subgroup to take this forward
- One meeting has been held which considered a number of key questions:
 - Is it all worth dealing with?
 - Can ARC even look at this?
 - Can we cope with this?
- Another meeting is planned, ahead of which there is a long list of questions for UCAS and requirements for statistics about admissions operating out of system.
- It is currently not clear what the rules are, where they are written down and what the penalties are. Consequently, HEIs have been exploring the boundaries of rules; with very little threat of sanctions.
- All HEIs have to give up a bit of competitive advantage to have a shared system.
- The Subgroup are working to a number of important key principles that include:
 - No unreasonable pressure on applicants
 - We have to be transparent about practice

- Fairness is protected by the law and QAA, not UCAS rules
- We can't have a rule that is openly broken
- We need to normalise current behaviour
- To better understand the current practices and views of the sector it is proposed to undertake an anonymous survey. The possible content of the survey was discussed.

15.13 Clearing Working Group

Received: A presentation from the Chair of the Clearing Working Group (CWG) on progress to date and to discuss potential change models (APG/15/03).

Noted:

- The models are based on design principles emerging as themes from regional forums.
- The models presented are just ideas and talking points, not concrete proposals.
- There is flexibility in the models with the possibility of splitting out models, mixing and matching elements of more than one.
- CWG are eager to hear comments on the models.
- The models should be on the agenda of the next round of regional forums ahead of further discussion at the 2015 Admissions Conference.
- CWG came up with four other mechanisms for release into clearing – these will be ready soon.
- ARC APG members are encouraged to take models away and consider them in detail.
- One suggested approach by which to consider the models is to dwell on patterns and themes of behaviour, concentrating on some principles.
- We must be able to undertake housekeeping, such as picking up applicants lost because of the system.
- Some applicants (e.g. BTec) get earlier results.
- Currently 1/3 of Clearing accepts are brand new to the UCAS system.
- We can't ignore the need to interview some students.
- The solution has to fit all the Home Nations.
- Applicants must be able to release themselves into Clearing.
- There is value in knowing why applicants have asked to be released.

Discussed:

- a) Model A(i):
 - Applicant still looking, using maintained live vacancy listings.
 - A Level-centric timescales are no longer relevant.
 - The CWG are keen for feedback on whether there is a need for a conditional offer in Clearing (e.g. for Art and Design or Nursing)?
 - Offers have minimum and maximum time limit attached.
 - At some point the applicant is required to accept one of the offers.
 - We are told that the Secondary School Sector want students to have the time to consider offers in Clearing
- b) Model A(ii):
 - Similar to A(i) but without phone calls.

- Applicants nominate HEIs at any point via Track.
 - HEI can consider them, make them offers and then once unplaced they are accepted.
 - Nomination system instead of panicked phone calls.
 - But how to police this? How to stop phone calls? Will people call anyway?
- c) Model B(i):
- Applicant is still looking – works for Adjustment and Clearing.
 - Applicant chooses what region, what subject area, possibly which HEIs.
 - HEIs supply UCAS with information on what programmes have vacancies and what the bare minimum requirements are (not published, confidential). Could try and match student outcome with bare minimum accepted.
 - Matches would appear in Track for the applicant.
 - Applicant indicates interest in some of the matches (fixed number).
 - HEI confirms if interested and issue time-limited offer.
 - Applicant accepts one offer.
 - Dealt with in Track not via phone calls.
- d) Model B(ii):
- HEI driven.
 - HEIs consider applicants on a list and make them offers.
- e) Model C:
- HEIs indicate willingness to reactivate declined offers on their system.
 - HEIs are maintaining vacancy systems at the same time.
 - Applicants consider the reactivated offers and if they don't want current UF place or are unplaced could pick one of reactivated offers.
 - Applicants could still receive direct offer from the HEI and push offer mechanism through Track.
 - Model recognises lots of applicants are placed in one of their original application choices.
 - Model offers the chance to reduce the burden of Clearing.
- f) UCAS Anytime:
- HEIs create an anytime vacancy listing.
 - Applicant has to meet eligibility criteria.
 - Applicant completes Apply (presume new to system).
 - Using Apply and ABL HEIs can see results.
 - Applicant makes themselves available with their criteria.
 - HEIs search in the information pot.
 - HEIs push applicants offers, at same time applicants can approach HEIs via Track and by phone.
 - Applicants accept one offer and decline the others.
 - A replacement to the RPA process.
 - Might help with variable start dates and recruiting international applicants.

15.14 Potential discussion items

- a) 2015-16 meeting venues – 2 in London, 1 in Leeds.

15.15 Any Other Business

- a) UCAS updates should be more focussed with information updates requested by members.

Action: Chair and Secretary of ARC APG

15.16 Dates of Future Meetings

Future meetings are scheduled take place on:

- Friday 12 June 2015 (Woburn House, London)
- Friday 6 November 2015 (Woburn House, London)
- Friday 12 February 2016 (Woburn House, London)
- Friday 10 June 2016 (Leeds, venue tbc)

DRAFT



ARC - Admissions Practitioners Group – 12 June 2015

Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme – Update Report

1. Review of SPA

SPA are very pleased that the UCAS Board has agreed the recommendations from the independent SPA Review Group and that UCAS will continue funding SPA on a permanent basis. SPA is currently also funded by HEFCW, UUK and DELNI and we will aim to discuss further funding with them shortly. SPA's work in developing and sharing high quality, evidenced-base good practice to support fair admissions is highly valued by the admissions community, particularly as the market develops in undergraduate provision. Learners, advisers and UCAS all benefit when HEP admissions teams are sharing and utilising good practice. The Review recognised the role, value and importance of the independent SPA Steering Group, which will continue to shape and define SPA's priorities. SPA will offer the same type of services and support to all HEPs UK-wide as it does now. We would like to thank all colleagues who contributed to the SPA Review.

2. SPA Activities

- (i) [SPA's Considerations for a Confirmation Action Plan](#) was updated and published at the end of May. It includes a checklist covering planning, communications, training, keeping up to date and operational issues.
- (ii) SPA's [Co-ordinating the relationship between recruitment and admissions](#) guide was recently published on the SPA website as part of our work on the Applicant Experience.

This guide was produced following a focus group with HEP staff to identify recommendations for improving the relationship between recruitment and admissions activity and the impact on applicants, as part of the applicant experience. It provides HEPs with an easy to use, five-step programme for examining the relationships between recruitment and admissions in their own institution, to make sure applicants and their advisors have a consistent message. If you wish to find out more, please contact Dan Shaffer (d.shaffer@spa.ac.uk).

- (iii) SPA's [guidance on competition law and admissions](#) issues was published in November 2014. If you have any enquiries, please contact Janet Graham (j.graham@spa.ac.uk).

a. Consumer Protection Law and admissions – CMA Advice to HE – all parts of the UK

SPA is working with Universities UK, UCAS and others to explain the issues and implications for HE providers raised in the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) advice to UK HE providers on consumer protection law that was issued on 12 March 2015. Consumer law is not devolved and therefore the advice relates to all HE providers across the UK.

The [CMA press release of 12 March](#) contains the links to the advice for HE providers as well as the advice published at the same time for students, which includes guidance for undergraduate students on how to report a potential breach of consumer law by a higher education provider.

SPA has raised awareness of the legislation at various events including a workshop the UCAS Admissions Conference in April. A copy of the presentation by the Director of SPA (with David Palfreyman, New College, Oxford) at that event, plus some additional slides on the new Consumer Rights Act 2015 which comes into force in October 2015 is below:

[SPA presentation: Applicants, higher education providers and consumer law April 2015](#)

HEPs should consider the CMA advice and ensure they comply, preferably by October 2015. If necessary HEPs should make changes to practices, policies, rules and regulations. The CMA will monitor the sector and commence a review in October 2015 to assess compliance with consumer law. Non-compliance could result in enforcement action by local authority Trading Standards Services (or in NI, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment) or by CMA. The CMA considered the law as it applies to HEPs of UG courses, may also be relevant to other courses.

The HE advice is the CMA's view, HE providers need to take their own legal advice. In admissions the significance of compliance entry requirements, terms and conditions for prospective students at the time the offer is made and complaints and appeals in admissions, which are handed by individual HEPs, with the final stage being the *Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)*.

Universities UK has Consumer Protection within HE as a major focus and is working directly to support the sector to understand the impact of the whole range of compliance, acknowledging that admissions forms just one part. UUK has involved the Association of University Legal Practitioners, AHUA, HELOA, SPA, ARC, UCAS and others. UUK has already chaired meetings of the CMA staff with [Association of University Legal Practitioners](#) (AULP) and also with the Academic Registrars Council (ARC).

Event: UUK have also organised **workshop on consumer protection issues and HE for staff in universities on Thursday 18 June at UUK in London**, with the CMA staff including one of their lawyers and Eversheds legal staff. Please see the UUK website if you wish to book.

SPA produced [brief guidance](#) for HEPs on terms and conditions in March 2014 following the OFT report, and will update our guidance in the light of outcomes from discussions with the CMA, UUK/ GuildHE and the CMA advice to HE.

b. Pre-HE curriculum and progression to HE

SPA has convened a new NETT for 2014/15 which is meeting 11-13 June, focusing on curriculum and qualification reforms throughout the UK. The NETT will consider the challenges that these reforms present to HE providers and to fair admissions, with the aim of identifying and developing good practice in evaluating and adapting to the changes. Our aim is to produce a suite of resources to HE providers. In addition to SPA the NETT consists of ten HEPs plus a UCAS representative.

If you would like to know more please contact Peter Chetwynd (p.chetwynd@spa.ac.uk).

c. SPA online Good Practice Toolkit

SPA has developed and ran a successful piloted of a new online toolkit to make our good practice resources more accessible, functional and easier for HEP admissions staff to share internally with colleagues for planning, reviewing or training. Three modules have been developed, with support and positive feedback from a focus group of HEPs who considered the pilot toolkit's usability and the extent to which it achieves the objective of providing a supportive and interactive framework for the HE sector.

We launched the pilot modules at the UCAS Admissions Conference before Easter and gathered comments from HEPs. All feedback will be taken on board for current and future module

development. If you have any suggestions for future modules or other queries please let us know at enquiries@spa.ac.uk. We look forward to sharing the Toolkit with a wider audience in due course.

d. Contextualised admissions

SPA together with HEDIIP ran a short **survey on contextualised admissions** to ascertain what data and information HEPs are using and what they would like to use in the future. The aim is to establish how the national picture has changed in the last two years and how SPA can further support HEPs in taking contextualised admissions forward. The survey responses are currently being analysed.

e. Admissions policies - update

SPA is aware that a number of HEPs are continuing to update their admissions policies or elements within their admissions policies. Just a reminder that our resources could be useful to you on this. See:

- [SPA's good practice statement on admissions policies](#) and [admissions policies checklist](#)
- [Gap analysis template for Chapter B2](#)
- [Presentations and resources from a July 2014 SPA Seminar on B2 and admissions policies](#)
- [Case study: Hartpury College](#)
- [Meeting the B2 Expectation - Reflections on Indicators 1, 2, 4 and 9](#)

If you have any queries on updating your admissions policy and implementation please let SPA know, we are happy to discuss these with you.

f. Using Admissions to Bridge the Gap for Care Leavers

The guide from SPA, [Using Admissions to bridge the gap for care leavers](#) was issued on 23 April, see www.spa.ac.uk/support/goodpractice/care/ Each example is also available as downloadable [case study](#).

This followed SPA's call for evidence asking the sector for specific good practice examples on how applicants in and from care are supported through the admissions process. These examples from the sector have been incorporated into the guide

SPA's call for evidence remains open and we would be happy to keep the guide up-to-date with new examples of good practice in this area. If you would like to add your examples of good practice within admissions, please submit them via our online [call for evidence submission](#).

Presentations and case studies from SPA's event on admissions and care leavers on 2 March is on the SPA website: www.spa.ac.uk/aboutus/events/spapastevents.

g. UCAS Tariff

SPA continues to provide a fair admissions angle on the new Qualifications Information System particularly with regard the new version of the UCAS Tariff, working with UCAS and HEP colleagues.

SPA encourages all HE providers – whether a 'Tariff-using' institution or not – to take time to understand how the UCAS Tariff has changed and what the potential impacts are for your recruitment, selection and admissions activities. SPA has published a set of considerations for HE admissions that has been well received available on the SPA website:

www.spa.ac.uk/support/qualifications/ucastariff, to help HEPs in engaging with these changes.

If you have any queries relating to engaging with the changes to the UCAS Tariff, or would like to discuss your own HEP plans with SPA, please contact Peter Chetwynd (p.chetwynd@spa.ac.uk).

h. HE in FE – College HE

This year SPA is supporting a College HE Admissions Community of Practice Executive Group to take forward professionalism and good practice in admissions in colleges. **Supporting College HE Admissions**, was held on 1 June 2015 in Birmingham. Participants discussed key issues, including advice from the CMA on consumer protection obligations within HE admissions and contributed to the development of the College HE Admissions Issue Review Plan.

SPA's expertise is a shared resource to answer HE providers' queries and to be an independent 'broker' to put HE providers in touch with each other. We also act as a broker on policy issues, between makers and implementers of policy.

The SPA team is always pleased to respond to queries on recruitment and admissions issues from staff in all types of HE provider. Please don't hesitate to contact us on 01242 544891 or enquiries@spa.ac.uk.

SPA Objectives (agreed core objectives to July 2015)

1.	To provide definitive expertise, advice and good practice on fair admissions to the UK HE sector and other stakeholders.
2.	To examine and research the how contextualised admissions can be developed for fair admissions in the UK HE sector.
3.	To work with staff in FE Colleges offering HE and stakeholders to develop fair admissions and good practice in admitting students to HE UK-wide. <i>SPA's resources are available to independent HE providers.</i>
4.	To examine and develop good practice for the collection and use of applicant information via direct (i.e. HEP-owned) application forms (e.g. for part-time courses and/or flexible learning, for postgraduate taught courses etc.)

JG/SPA, June 2015

Report

APG/15/09

12th June 2015

UCAS Update

1. Feedback from the Admissions Conference 2015

This year's Admissions Conference was attended by 284 delegates from 145 HEPs. 37% of those who attended did so for the first time.

The general feedback from the post event survey (completed by 197 delegates) was positive:

- Overall organisation of the conference: 92% rated it as "great" or "good"
- Venue and location: the majority were generally happy with Celtic Manor as the venue and would happily return next year
- Sli.do (audience interaction tool): 83% rated this as very useful and 13% fairly useful
- Business sessions and plenaries: all received very positive feedback
- Breakout sessions: the vast majority of the sessions were rated as either fairly or extremely useful by 90% of delegates

Key take-aways to inform planning for next year's Admissions conference include:

- Duration of the conference (some comments that three days is too long)
- No after dinner band
- Increase sector involvement in developing and delivering content
- Improve the experience for first time attendees

2. Summary findings from the HEP Satisfaction Survey

The purpose of the annual HEP Satisfaction Survey is to understand the main sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction HEPs have of doing business with UCAS. This gives us the insight to focus on addressing the main causes of dissatisfaction. The focus of the survey is on the service delivered by UCAS people, our products and services, engagement and communication and the extent to which HEPs feel UCAS is delivering on its vision and mission.

This year's survey was completed by 276 respondents (a 13% response rate) 70% of whom were Admissions Practitioners with other respondents coming from Marketing, Student Recruitment and IT roles.

The overall theme which emerges from this year's survey is *"things are getting better but there is still a lot of room for improvement"*.

58% of respondents stated that their overall experience of UCAS in the last year was "Great" or "Good" (in comparison to 54% last year). This marks the end of a three year downward trend in overall satisfaction. It is clear that the *service* delivered by our customer facing teams is highly valued, but the user experience of some of our *services* (in particular Course Collect) is impacting on HEPs experience of UCAS.

Key themes of HEP satisfaction include the service delivered by UCAS teams (in particular the Relationship Managers, HEP Team and IT Relationship Managers); communications (in particular the improvements made to our weekly HEP bulletin); and engagement (with the UCAS Groups and Forums seen as an effective engagement platform).

Key themes of dissatisfaction include Course Collect, which we'll be rebuilding as part of our new admissions services for the future; the HEP technical support experience in terms of reporting and resolving IT issues, which we are aiming to resolve through the outsourcing of our IT Help Desk to our IT partners, Infosys; and a general lack of trust which we're aiming to address by ensuring HEP engagement in shaping the development of our new admission services.

3. Update on the development of new admissions services for the future

Background

At the Annual Review Meeting in November 2014 and the Admissions Conference in March 2015, we outlined our strategy for the development of new admissions services for the future. Rather than continue to make lots of small changes to existing systems and services, we are investing in the development of new, easy to use, flexible and adaptable services.

The admissions services which we are developing include Search, Collection and Apply. The long term aim is to transform these services across all five schemes but adapted to meet the individual needs of each scheme. We have to meet this challenge on a phased basis and will begin with UCAS Postgraduate. This approach poses the least risk as the scheme is relatively small and gives us the opportunity to test our new approach to development (Agile methodology) before rolling out the solutions. Also, the scheme does not involve any key dates and so provides us with flexibility.

Current position and next steps

Development work has begun on the PG search tool. We have been working closely with learners and HEPs to understand how they use it and the level of information they need to help make the right choices.

We want you to be fully involved in the feedback progress and work with us to develop the new admissions services. The feedback process is ongoing and frequent and works in the following way:

- We will develop a feature for testing
- It will be sent to users for testing
- Users will supply feedback
- Feedback will be collated, passed to our development teams and placed on UCAS.com so that all customers can access it

4. Preparations for Confirmation and Clearing 2015

2015 Undergraduate Admissions Cycle

Detailed planning for Confirmation and Clearing (C&C) has been completed. Some key areas of IT risk have been identified and a programme of work is nearing completion to mitigate those risks. A major programme of testing, or Dry Runs, has commenced which will test all of the UCAS IT estate to 200% of the volumes experienced on A Level Results Day last year in order to provide confidence that no issues will be experienced.

The complex task of processing results from Awarding Bodies has begun with UCAS working closely with partners to improve ways of working together. Winter results and previous results have been released to HEPs and Summer Presentation Files have arrived from all of the main Awarding Bodies. A number of changes have been

implemented for this cycle including a more efficient way of processing BTEC results and the provision of Access to HE unit grades to providers. The latter of these changes was welcomed at the Admissions Conference.

Two key changes to Clearing have been introduced this cycle. The first is to launch the Clearing Vacancy Search in early July rather than waiting until the two Results Days. This will enable learners who already know their results to start looking for a Clearing place earlier than ever before. The second is to open Clearing on Scottish Results day at 10:00 instead of 14:30. This is at the request of the Scottish Standing Group as well as other key stakeholder groups.

2016 Undergraduate Admissions Cycle

The system rollover for the main undergraduate scheme has been completed with Apply for Advisors and Applicants launching in May, earlier than ever before.

Final plans for the launch of the 2016 Teacher Training scheme had been on hold pending the outcome of the General Election. Now that this uncertainty has been resolved, activity is underway to complete planning for the launch of the scheme.

5. Precision Marketing Data Service

As outlined at the Admissions Conference earlier this year, we have introduced a highly targeted marketing service which uses UCAS data analysis to enable HEPs to proactively reach the best suited unplaced candidates with Clearing vacancies.

It is an optional, paid for service and has been rolled out as a pilot this academic year to gauge demand from both HEPs and applicants. Applicants must opt in to be eligible and will still be able to go through Clearing.

From A level results day, HEPs that decide to use the service will receive details of unplaced applicants who have opted in and who match their course entry profiles based on historical data.

To date, approximately 70,000 applicants have opted in to the service and over 50 HEPs have expressed an interest in it.

Minutes

UAG/15/M1

Undergraduate Advisory Group meeting
held on Thursday 26 February 2015, 11:00, at UCAS, Cheltenham.

Chair:	Bob Savill	University of Chichester
Attendees:	Alison Charles Alison Wilde Deborah Mitchell John Wright Kim Eccleston Marie-Nöel Earley Lynsey Hopkins Pat Watson Peter Derrick Sarah Simms Susie King	University of Manchester Nottingham Trent University Bangor University The University of Law University of Warwick University of St Andrews The University of Sheffield Anglia Ruskin University Middlesex University University for the Creative Arts University of Bedfordshire
Apologies:	Jeremy Rowe Richard Emborg	London South Bank University Durham University
UCAS in attendance:	Andy Frampton Anneka Lewis Chris Wallace Clare Cozens David Brack Denise Chaffer Kate Davidson	Relationship Manager HEP Experience Manager Head of Product Management Scheme Delivery Owner Head of HEP Experience Groups and Forums Administrator Senior Relationship Manager
SPA in attendance:	Jeni Clack	SPA Admissions Support & Development Adviser

A1/15/01 Welcome and apologies

Bob Savill, Chair, welcomed the Group to the meeting and the apologies were noted. Bob informed the Group that Amanda Spate and Graeme Slater had stepped down from the Group, therefore it was suggested to highlight the vacancies at the Admissions Conference and ask for expressions of interest subsequent to the Conference.

AF
UAG082

A1/15/02 Minutes and actions from the last meeting

The previous minutes were accepted as an accurate and true reflection of the meeting.

The open actions were discussed and no further updates were made.

A1/15/03 Clearing Working Group

Peter Derrick, Middlesex University and Chair of the Clearing Working Group, updated the Group on the progress of the Clearing Working Group since the last meeting. The Clearing Working Group were in the process of attending regional forums and other Groups to gain feedback from the sector relating to Clearing and ideas for the way forward. Following discussions and feedback several models were created whilst not being constrained by the current technical resources. These were:

- Model A1 based on the idea of conditional / unconditional offers where HEPs push the decisions to applicants through Track.
- Model A2 similar to A1 but introduces the concept that applicants can make themselves aware to HEPs through Track moving away from having to make numerous phone calls.
- Model B1 creates a 'Match.com' style approach to Clearing through which applicants and HEPs are matched based on additional criteria. Model B1 focusses on applicants 'pushing' themselves to HEPs. Model B2 is similar to B1 but focusses on HEPs pushing offers to applicants.
- Model C has also been referred to as UCAS Re-active with the idea that as many applicants at Clearing are finally placed to one of their original five choices HEPs should be given the option of being able to reactivate declined offers. Although not specifically within the remit of the Group, this model could be a viable alternative to the insurance choice and could reduce the number of applicants going through the Clearing process.
- Model UCAS Anytime would run in parallel to the main scheme and focusses on creating a process for applicants who already hold their qualifications and are currently forced into Clearing when applying post 30th June. The model also looks to rectify some of the issues with Multiple Start Dates and RPAs.

These models will undergo further refinement based on the feedback from upcoming Regional Forums and be presented at the Admissions Conference. It is envisaged that there may not be one model which being the final outcome but rather a mix of the models

available. Peter stated that at present the Clearing Working Group does not have a preference of a model. Peter also informed the Group that a suite of releasing into Clearing models could also be developed as requested by the secondary education sector.

Following a lengthy debate several questions were raised, which included whether HEPs should retain control over the elements of the process or hand control over to the applicant. The models need to acknowledge and address the significant amount of bypassing the UCAS system that occurs each year. How would the models cope with the popular interview subjects and conditional offers?

The Group stated that they would want the entire process to be visible at every step of the way and that there is a need to balance the suitability, flexibility and complexity with ensuring that the new system is easy for applicants to understand and is fair so no one is discouraged from applying. Clear and explicit guidance would be needed.

Emerging from the larger Clearing Working Group ideas, members asked about the possibility of an immediate change in asking whether the vacancy list could be made available as soon as the main scheme closes from 1 July. Clare Cozens, Scheme Delivery Owner, stated that no systems changes would be required for this change as this would be a minor enhancement and the vacancy list could be advertised from beginning of July and all clearing vacancies would default to open. If this change was to happen this year, however, a decision would have to be made in the coming weeks.

The Group asked if it would be possible to include provisional as well as open and closed courses, however Clare confirmed that at present this would not be possible for this year but could be in the future.

The Group was asked to approve this change, however members felt that further consultation was required in the sector to ascertain the impact. Andy Frampton agreed that UCAS would distribute some wording around the change so that UAG colleagues could discuss with others in the sector. UCAS would also ensure that this topic was a discussion at the upcoming Regional Forums. Responses should be returned to UCAS by mid-March so that a decision could be made. AF UAG083

Bob Savill and the Group, thanked Peter for all of the excellent work and thoughtful discussions undertaken by the Clearing Working Group.

A1/15/04 Operations update

Clare Cozens, Scheme Delivery Owner, gave the Group an update on operations.

Clare informed the Group that the 15 January deadline was successful and the 18:00 deadline worked well. The lead up to the day was smooth with minimal IT incidents, and the incidents that did occur were resolved quickly. There was also an extensive communications drive to applicants focussing on not leaving applications to the last minute, to encourage early completion and submission. Figures for 15 January deadline are:

- 140,000 applications were submitted during the week of the deadline

- 40,000 were submitted on 14 January
- 50,000 submitted on 15 January
- A total of just under 600,000 applications were submitted in total
- Overall, there was a 2% increase in applications
- There was a 1% increase in UK applicants
- A 7% increase in EU applicants
- A 3% increase in applicants from outside the EU

There had been some concerns due to bad weather where four schools were affected by power outages. UCAS worked directly with the schools concerned to ensure applicants were not disadvantaged, and to ensure the applications were submitted and considered as 'on time'. The Group expressed their thanks for the quick processing rate this year.

Confirmation and Clearing plans and preparations are well underway. Internal working Groups have been established to ensure clear communications with regular bulletin updates are issued.

Clare informed the Group that UCAS would be in partnership with The Telegraph again this year, along with the Exam Results Helpline. Clare also noted that HEPs would receive the unit grade information for Access to HE Diplomas this year.

The Group raised the issue of the invitation to interview letters, following some feedback from the sector and applicants that these were very confusing for applicants. Currently it was estimated that a third of HEPs use these letters. The Group agreed that the current letter is not ideal and suggested that the wording should be amended. Clare stated that the letter was reworded twice last year but this still resulted in confusion, therefore the Group were asked to feedback to Clare who would forward this onto the relevant team to amend.

All
UAG084

A1/15/05 Digital acceleration

Chris Wallace, Head of Product Management, joined the meeting to introduce the Group to digital acceleration. Chris explained to the Group that rather than continue to make changes to existing legacy systems, which are highly resource intensive, UCAS is now investing in the development of new digital products and services with the long term aim to become a globally recognised destination for all postgraduate and undergraduate admissions services. The term for this strategy is digital acceleration; this is not a replacement strategy but a more aggressive approach to transforming the current UCAS technical estate; UCAS still aims to deliver the goals of the CASE initiative discussed in October. Chris confirmed that UCAS is currently recruiting skilled IT experts to work on this, noting that this will not impact on operational delivery, particularly Confirmation and Clearing 2015. UCAS also intends to work closely with all customers throughout the planning, development, testing and implementation of the digital acceleration initiatives in order to fully understand the needs of the customers and improve the learner experience.

Chris informed the Group that it had been decided that the first live products built as part of the admissions initiative would be for the Postgraduate market As the Postgraduate

market is not cycle dependent this approach will enable UCAS to develop and test a new apply service whilst minimising the risks to the larger Undergraduate scheme. In developing the new services there would be elements of trial and error and by tackling these first in the Postgraduate scheme it allows the opportunity to learn and get the right outcome for the Undergraduate scheme.

The Group fed back their view that the Undergraduate scheme should be tackled first as it would benefit most HEPs. They want to see the benefits of a new service first and felt that the Postgraduate scheme has specific requirements that are irrelevant to Undergraduate scheme. Chris reassured the Group that the underlying technology platforms for the schemes would be built in conjunction, therefore once the Postgraduate scheme has a viable service, this would be rolled out to the Undergraduate scheme.

The Group felt that the plans and rationale for beginning with the Postgraduate scheme needed more clarification. Chris explained to the Group that there would be a much clearer view of the development within the next six months. The Group, however stated that they would like to see clarification of these concerns prior to the Admissions Conference.

CW/DB
UAG085

Chris stated that UCAS were committed to listening to the needs of its customers. All developments would be user focussed and would undergo extensive user testing with HEPs, applicants and advisors. Regular engagement would take place with Relationship Managers, Groups and Forums, focus Groups, working Groups, Yammer, conferences and bulletins, with the intention of going out to HEPs and engaging with agencies and official bodies to obtain direct feedback and gain a deep understanding of the requirements of the sector. David Brack highlighted that there would be drop in sessions open to all audiences at the Admissions Conference dedicated to digital acceleration so the sector can give their feedback and thoughts for the new developments.

Chris also informed the Group that Course Collect had been reviewed and considered against the aspirations of the business. The outcome was that it was deemed to be not fit for purpose and therefore the product would be completely rebuilt as part of the digital acceleration strategy. Whilst broadly agreeing with the analysis that the Course products were unsatisfactory, members highlighted that the Course Collect and Search products were not "legacy" products, as such, and that just last year, over a million pounds had been devoted to the Repair and Resolve project.

The Group thanked Chris for attending the meeting and introducing digital acceleration

A1/15/06 UCAS Update for ARCAPG

David Brack tabled a paper on the UCAS update for ARCAPG.

The Annual Review Meeting, November 2014

The annual review meeting took place in November 2014, David reported on feedback received from the post event survey. The event had good attendance from the sector, the post event survey captured the feeling that the event had met expectations with the most useful plenary sessions being the new Tariff, Clearing Working Group update and Mary Curnock-Cook's welcome which included the end of cycle insight. It was noted that when UCAS plan for next year's event the sector would like to receive papers in advance. David agreed that UCAS would endeavour to get papers out in advance. Suggestions received included to shorten the programme slightly or possibly hold the event over two days; have question and answer sessions after each agenda item; and improve the visual quality of presentations. The group asked if there would be a possibility to combine the Undergraduate annual review with the UTT annual review. David agreed to look into this. Other feedback received was that the location of the venue was liked however but some facilities were not very satisfactory.

International Admissions Review

The implementation of the IAR recommendations remains a priority, however the majority of the recommendations would be incorporated into the digital acceleration project. Work had already commenced on improving information and guidance and enhancing attendance at overseas events. The Group were interested in the formation of any working groups related to the development of the undergraduate scheme. The aim was to include the IAR recommendations and next steps on the agenda of the next Change Steering Group, taking place in May.

Admissions Conference

David expressed huge thanks to Andy Frampton and Kate Murray for leading the organisation of the 2015 Admissions Conference. Following feedback from previous conferences it was suggested by the sector that there should be less UCAS content and more HEP content. David informed the group that work had taken place through Yammer groups and groups and forums in conjunction with the sector, to shape the conference agenda for this year. The conference programme included five plenary sessions featuring speakers such as Professor Sir Steve Smith, and a qualification reform discussion panel representing each of the countries within the UK. There would also be six business sessions which would focus on the development of admissions service, Clearing Working Group, and the schools perspective on HE admissions process. 40 breakout sessions would also take place. David informed the group that this would be the last time that the conference would take place at Celtic Manor and that UCAS would look for a new venue for next year's conference. Andy Frampton also noted that he required a further speaker for the debate sessions therefore Andy would email the group for volunteers.

Candidate Matching

The proposal to offer a targeted applicant / HEP matching service for Clearing was discussed. It was noted that Bob Savill and Peter Derrick had been invited to discuss the initial idea with UCAS Media in January and that, following further consultation with the sector, the project was now under UCAS' remit. Further consultation with the sector would be undertaken to develop the product.

End of cycle 2014 – key findings

David reported that the 2014 cycle looked like a return to normality of 2011, the market had emerged and HEPs had worked a lot harder during the last cycle to make more offers and increase their flexibility of entry requirements.

The 2015 January deadline was positive, application volumes increased in the 2 weeks prior to deadline, there is a continued and significant demand for HE from applicants and this continues to increase for UK and EU applicants. The only negative indicator is that the applications from mature students are down

The 2014 End of Cycle statistics were published on 21st January following a one month confidential preview period for HEPs. The key headlines were:

- For the first time over half a million people were placed in higher education – up 3.4% on 2013
- There were more acceptances than ever from both within and outside of the UK
- The total number of applicants (699,700) almost equalled the levels seen in 2011 (700,200) and applicant numbers have increased from all UK countries
- Universities and Colleges made more offers to applicants (up 6%) this year, with the number receiving a full set of five offers at its highest ever level
- Placed applicant numbers from all age groups in the UK have never been higher
- Entry rates from young people in the least advantaged groups have increased to record highs across the UK
- Disadvantaged young people are over 10% more likely to enter HE than they were a year ago
- The entry rate for those holding BTECs has risen once more this year

2015 Cycle January deadline statistics

On 30th January, we published our analysis of full time undergraduate applications considered “on time” for the 15th January deadline. The headline findings were:

- A 2% increase in the total number of applicants (592,290) compared to the same point last year (the increase in real terms is 1% as a large set of teacher training courses in Scotland are recruiting through the undergraduate scheme for the first time in 2015 having previously recruited through UTT)
- There is a 7% increase in applicants from the EU and a 3% increase from those outside the EU
- Application rates for 18 year olds in all UK countries are at their highest ever levels, but the number of applicants from older age groups have reduced this year
- Young people from the most disadvantaged areas across the UK are more likely to apply to higher education than ever before
- In total over 90,000 more women have applied than men

A1/15/07 EU Membership

Andy Frampton informed the group that Amsterdam Fashion Academy was the first EU provider to become a customer of UCAS for main scheme Search and Apply. Andy apologised that this information was made public through an investigative piece of journalism, as it is not our approach to discuss individual customer applications with other customers. Andy informed the group that each application from EU providers would be considered on merit, and that all customers had to abide by the same terms of service. UCAS did not change its criteria specifically to allow EU providers to become customers. We changed the criteria in 2013 to ensure that any new UCAS customers meet stringent quality standards and to differentiate between customers and members. UCAS will continue to operate and comply with both UK and EU competition legislation, and apply criteria for access to our services equally to all providers within the jurisdiction.

A1/15/08 Any Other Business

Change Steering Group

A concern was raised relating to the low attendance at the previous Change Steering Group meeting that took place in October 2014 where only one sector representative attended. David Brack stated that this was not reflective of the Group as other meetings had been well attended and assured the Group that future meetings would be better attended by the sector.

A1/15/09 Next meeting

The date of the next meeting would be on Wednesday 24 June 2015, taking place at UCAS, meeting invites have already been issued to the Group.

Meeting notes

PAG/15/M1

UKPASS / Postgraduate – Planning for the future
held on Thursday 12 February, 10:30 – 15:00, at UCAS, Cheltenham.

Chair:	Wendy Webster	University of Dundee
Attendees:	Alistair Garmendia Anne Wilson Bhavesh Varsani Catherine Gilmore David George Jeremy Rowe Kerry O'Shea Michelle Magee Mohammed Mesbahi	University of Winchester Edge Hill University University of Westminster London South Bank University Oxford Brookes University London South Bank University University of Bristol University of Westminster Islamic College for Advanced Studies
Apologies:	Thomas Kidd	University of Gloucestershire
UCAS in attendance:	Andrew Hargreaves Andy Gillett Chris Wallace Denise Chaffer Fatuma Mahad Kate Butland Louise Cyprien Melanie Green Peter Evans Vickie Phair	Director of Marketing Communications Head of IT Engagement Head of Strategic Product Management Groups and Forums Administrator Director of Operations Head of Customer Strategy Scheme Delivery Owner Business Architect Relationship Manager (Wales & South West) Market Intelligence Manager

A1/15/01 Welcome and apologies

Wendy Webster, Chair, welcomed the group to the UKPASS / Postgraduate meeting, and the apologies were noted. The members of the group each gave individual introductions. Peter Evans Relationship Manager informed the group that the meeting was going to be a more interactive session looking at the way forward for UKPASS.

A1/15/02 Implementing digital acceleration & UCAS' approach

Andrew Hargreaves, Director Marketing Communications, outlined the context of digital acceleration.

UCAS are changing the way they work as an organisation moving towards working in a more agile dynamic way to improve the learner journey and customer experience, with a single sign on / password for all UCAS schemes. The current technical estate is not fit for purpose, therefore no changes would be made to the legacy estate, UCAS are looking towards rebuilding a new technical estate that is flexible and future proof. UCAS Board approval has allocated £8m of additional funds over the next two years to facilitate the changes to the technical estate. It had been decided to begin this process firstly on the Postgraduate scheme before rolling this out onto the other UCAS schemes as Postgraduate is a smaller and therefore lower risk scheme to begin on. New development teams are being created with the appropriate skills and vision to take this forward.

The new UCAS.com website was successfully launched on 22 January 2015 following extensive redevelopment. Andrew reported that the UCAS website generates over 142m hits every year.

Nothing will go live until there is a viable product that has sector approval, the aim is to have a new Search product out to market by October 2015 and new application products by June 2016.

Following review it was agreed that Course Collect is not capable of delivering an acceptable level of service therefore this would be rebuilt and redesigned as part of digital acceleration.

Continuous engagement with the sector is key to the success of digital acceleration and intensive market research would also be carried out

A1/15/03 Helping us to understand Postgraduate/UKPASS

Mel Green asked the group to split into three groups to highlight areas of concern in Postgraduate / UKPASS, the responses were:

Group 1

- International is seen as a barrier, applicants are dealing with the universities directly
- The system is not tailored
- Clunky system
- Do not know which applicants have started the process and not finished.

Group 2

- Lots of overlaps with no real connections
- Different types of data
- Do not know who the competitors are
- Terminology of data entry, references and distance learners

Group 3

- Document management barriers
- Applicants accepting offers
- References
- Ability for learners to amend their own record / applications
- Lack of customisation
- Terminology
- Not configurable to users' needs
- Agent portal
- Withdrawal of offers / acceptances
- Character limitations
- No test environments available
- Graduate prospects
- Lack of market intelligence

A1/15/04 Helping us to understand Postgraduate/UKPASS

The group were asked to make their suggestions in three separate groups:

Group 1

- Entry level data
- Documentation – needs to be accurate and correct
- Storage of data
- Early detection
- Single sign on
- Easy to flow through the process
- Pre-screening
- Flexible systems to switch on / off
- Speed of processes / response times
- Webchat facilities to have meetings with academics, interviews, distance learners

action

- Intelligent systems which detects individuals early on in their learning journey
- Overseas internet restrictions and speeds
- Applicant timeline
- Searching technology promoting appropriate and tailored searches

Group 2

- Registration for learners
- Similarity detection
- Fraud detection
- Data reporting back to HESA
- Fee assessment
- Shared services
- UKVI requirements
- Contact details
- Data quality
- Customisation of institution questions
- ATAS certificate
- Document management
- Deferred applicants
- Vacancy management

Group 3

- Simple learner journey and guidance
- Joined up concise process for applicants and providers
- Future proofing of systems
- Flexibility of systems
- Customised applications
- Verification of data
- IT compatibility
- Simplistic processes for all

A1/15/05 Next steps

The next steps identified were:

- To pull together a strong proposition that address the problems in the market, it is not expected to be perfect for all.
- On the right track, lots of work to be done and further engagement to be carried out.
- Review the market intelligence currently available
- Demonstrate customers are getting value for money
- Develop product visions
- Encouragement of internal Postgraduate groups to get in touch so UCAS obtain a full view of the market
- Creation of a Postgraduate story board

action

- Establishment of monthly based telekits / webinars
- Attending other Postgraduate meetings i.e. Scottish PG group
- Obtain regular feedback from the Postgraduate members and colleagues in the sector

A1/15/06 Any Other Business

None

A1/15/07 Date of next meeting

It was agreed to hold monthly webinars starting from the end of March with the next Postgraduate Advisory Group meeting taking place in June.

Minutes

DG/15/M1

Data Group meeting held on Tuesday 10 February 2015, at UCAS, Cheltenham

Chair:	Wendy Webster	University of Dundee
Attendees:	Christine Giles Daniel Farrell Gurjit Nijjar Helen Reed James Brown Judith Davison Jo Hamilton Laura Cruise Nick Bhugeloo Paul Ashby Stella Fowler	University of Portsmouth University of St Andrews University of Derby University of Cambridge University of Glasgow University of Huddersfield University of Exeter Oxford Brookes Kingston University University of Birmingham University of Gloucestershire (representing the Higher Education Strategic Planners Association)
	Steve Walsh Tania Smith	Aberystwyth University University of Manchester
Apologies:	Daniel King Emma Christmas James Ackroyd	University of Surrey Keele University University of Reading
UCAS in attendance:	Andy Gillett Ben Perry Carys Fisher Chris Wallace Denise Chaffer Fiona Watts Helen Thorne James Harley Louise Cyprien Mike Spink	Head of IT Engagement Data Scientist Policy Executive Head of Product Management Groups & Forums Administrator UTT Relationship Manager Director of External Relations Principal Analyst Scheme Delivery Manager Enterprise Architect

01/15/M1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed the Data Group meeting attendees and apologies were noted. The group also welcomed Stella Fowler, who was representing the Higher Education Strategic Planners Association, to the group. It was noted that Barbara Jones, Teesside University, had to leave the group due to changes in her job role.

02/15/M1 Minutes and actions from the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as an accurate and true representation of the meeting.

The open actions were discussed:

- DG004 College representative – this had been pursued with the UCAS College HE Advisory Group, the Association of Colleges and SPA in to encourage involvement from the sector and to recruit a member of the college HE sector to join the Data Group.
- DG017 – a duplicated action to be removed.

03/15/M1 Presentation on digital acceleration and the redevelopment of Apply

Chris Wallace, Head of Product Management, joined the meeting to discuss digital acceleration and the redevelopment of Apply. This was the first time the term 'digital acceleration' had been communicated with the sector.

It was explained to the group that, rather than continue to make changes to existing legacy systems, which were highly resource intensive, UCAS was now investing in the development of new digital products and services. The long term aim was to become a globally recognised destination for all postgraduate and undergraduate admissions services. The term for this strategy was digital acceleration; this was not a replacement strategy but a more aggressive stance for transforming the current UCAS technical estate. UCAS still aimed to deliver the goals of the CASE initiative, discussed in October. UCAS was currently recruiting skilled IT experts to work on this development, and the strategy would not impact on operational delivery, particularly Confirmation and Clearing 2015. UCAS also intended to work closely with all customers throughout the planning, development, testing and implementation of the digital acceleration initiatives, to fully understand customer needs and improve the learner experience.

It had been decided the admissions initiative would begin with the Postgraduate scheme – with the intention to test, innovate and build a new admissions service, working in partnership with the UKPASS community. This approach would enable

UCAS to develop and test a new Apply service, whilst minimising the risks to the larger Undergraduate scheme

UCAS was committed to listening to the needs of its customers. All developments would be user-focused and undergo extensive user-testing with providers, applicants and advisers. Regular engagement would take place with Relationship Managers, groups and forums, focus groups, working groups, Yammer, conferences and bulletins. Providers, agencies and other official bodies would be asked for feedback, to gain a deep understanding of sector requirements. The needs of the postgraduate sector would be collected and collated by mid-March, when the development and build would start.

CW/WW
DG022

Volunteers from the various groups and forums would be sought to join the working groups, and a further meeting would be held to discuss how best to ensure data aspects were fully considered.

Course Collect had been reviewed and deemed to be not fit for purpose. Therefore the product would be completely rebuilt as part of the digital acceleration strategy. The group requested that the outstanding concerns from the Courses Repair and Resolve Project be addressed as part of this work.

The group questioned the longevity of the new technological estate. Full consideration had been taken in building a product that was right for the future – people's online behaviour was constantly changing, and therefore engagement was key to fully understand customer needs.

The group raised the issue of system software suppliers and if they would be fully engaged in UCAS' digital acceleration. Andy Gillett, UCAS' Head of IT Engagement, stated that once the design of the new products had been agreed, the various software suppliers would be fully engaged to understand the implications and future plans. An engagement plan was in place and the Technical Relationship Team would be carrying out visits to suppliers.

The aim was to have a working Search product for postgraduate courses by October 2015 and an application service out to market by March 2016. The Graduate Prospects contract ran until June 2016 and would not be renewed.

There was some debate about the functionality of the new postgraduate service and whether receipt of transcripts would be within scope. UCAS was aware of European efforts to standardise this and the scope of the development was yet to be defined. The group felt strongly that providers beyond existing UKPASS users must be engaged in the development if the Course Collect and Apply solutions were to be used for a renewed undergraduate service.

The group felt that some providers would be concerned that UCAS was planning to spend a considerable amount of money developing a postgraduate service, as

action

this was not something which they wanted. It was reiterated that postgraduate represented a much lower risk way of developing and testing new admissions service components. The group recommended that UCAS undertook more engagement with the HE sector about the purpose, benefits and timescales of digital acceleration to encourage buy-in. Comments made by the group would be fed back to the digital acceleration team.

CW
DG023

04/15/M1 Top five data quality issues

Mike Spink, Data Enterprise Architect, presented paper DG/15/001. This identified the top five data quality issues for each major customer group and highlighted some of the issues caused by poor data quality. The group was invited to comment on whether UCAS had identified the right issues, and to prioritise these and identify options for improving or resolving them.

The group responded that this was a useful paper but felt that a critical issue missing from a provider's perspective was the consistency of data descriptions, e.g. rules allowing/disallowing lower or upper case letters. This could generate queries in provider systems, and it was suggested that UCAS needed to impose data standards. It was agreed to add this to a list of issues. The group also agreed that data validation at the point of capture was key and should be included.

MS
DG024

The group observed there was a need to understand the root causes of the different issues in the paper, and a plan should be produced to set out how each could be addressed. Whilst a number of the issues were clearly technical and would need to await the redevelopment of Apply, others appear to be related to user understanding or misinterpretation of meta-data and could be addressed now.

To check if the primary data quality issues had been identified it was suggested that UCAS should analyse the data queries received by the helpdesk to ascertain the type of issues reported. Louise Cyprien agreed to undertake this action, but informed the group that the results would only date back to April 2014 as this was when the new helpdesk service (Infosys) was implemented. However, she would investigate if it was possible to research historical queries, and report back to the group.

LC
DG025

It was suggested that UCAS look at the data improvement schedule which was presented at the Change User Group – this would be located and communicated back to the group.

LC
DG026

In addition, the group agreed it would like to carry out a Yammer survey to find out what other data quality issues providers had. This should be informed by the helpdesk survey results. James Brown and Jo Hamilton volunteered to be involved.

MS
DG027

action

In terms of the top five provider data quality issues in the paper, the group noted that 5.1 (schools data) was well understood and would need to be addressed with the redevelopment of the undergraduate service, as would 5.4 (inability to list courses from more than one cycle). 5.2 (maintaining multiple courses datasets) was an issue for the sector to tackle. However, UCAS could look in more detail at 5.3 (getting UCAS communications to the right person in providers) and 5.5 (applying data quality rules to courses data at point of entry). UCAS agreed to come back with a proposal.

MS
DG028

It was suggested that group members should volunteer to champion data quality and work with UCAS on each of these issues. It was also suggested that there needed to be more interaction with the Technical Group, which was meeting on 17 February. Andy Gillett, group owner of the Technical Group, confirmed he would discuss this with Peter Service, the new Chair of the Technical Group, to take this forward.

AG
DG029

The group agreed that this was a very good paper to stimulate debate and looked forward to further discussions and resolutions.

05/15/M1 UCAS Exact analytical service and Strobe applicant tracking service

James Harley, Principal Analyst and Ben Perry, Data Scientist, joined the meeting to give a presentation on Exact and Strobe.

James outlined Exact (Expanded Adaptable Customer Tabulations) – a new service from UCAS that provided customers with a wide range of analytical data, to individual specifications from the UCAS Undergraduate scheme. Exact was capable of producing more than six billion output tables. The data could be selected over a range of years going back to the 2004 application cycle. Exact was an agile service, in continual development based on customer feedback.

Exact was available to everyone, not just providers, and used a custom-built pricing model. The costs were on a sliding scale, driven by the extent, complexity and resolution of data requested. The prices were calculated instantly and the average turnaround for requests was two-three days. It was also confirmed that a provider's own data would be offered to them free of charge.

The group queried the possibility of a self-service subscription to Exact as it felt that paying for individual queries would become costly and cumbersome. This would be investigated.

JH
DG030

The soft launch of Exact took place in November 2014 and to date there had been 124 individual requests. The main launch of Exact was scheduled to take place in

action

spring 2015. The documentation was currently being refined with UCAS Media and would be available online shortly.

It was confirmed that extensive testing had taken place and UCAS was confident that the data supplied was accurate. Members questioned how UCAS had mapped different versions of JACs – this would be looked into.

JH
DG031

The group also questioned the need to be aware of the level of suppression before committing to requesting a report. It was confirmed that a diagnostic of the report was run first to demonstrate this.

Members asked if it would be possible to use Exact to look at numbers of unconditional offers made. It currently included data about total number of offers made, but not offer types.

There were a number of questions about the nature and extent of data available in Exact. The group wanted to know exactly what information about their provider would be available to other providers and third parties. This information would be provided to the group. The data now available had previously been available via UCAS' bespoke analytical service and Exact was a very significant improvement on this. It did not contain live cycle data. Licencing arrangements limited the reuse, publication and resale of data.

JH
DG032

The group said providers would want to know who had requested data about them and what had been supplied, not least because this could generate FOIA requests or press enquiries. Providers would like to be notified if their data had been requested, as HESA currently issued notifications if their data had been requested by a third party. The group also requested a list of the types of requests made – this would be reviewed.

Members asked what information about providers was in the public domain and how this had been decided. The group was informed that the publishing of the End of Cycle data had been discussed at the Annual Review Meeting, with Council and with HESPA and ARC-APG representatives. Since most of the FOIA requests UCAS received were for data, the published datasets were also designed to address this

It was confirmed that AppTrack was part of the legacy estate and therefore is not able to offer the functionality required. The digital acceleration project would investigate developing another replacement product.

Strobe – Standardised tracking of outcomes with benchmarking and evaluation

Ben Perry, Data Scientist, outlined another service which was currently being trialled. Strobe was an application that tracked an individual's data into UCAS admissions and reported on key admissions cycle outcomes in an aggregated

action

manner. Strobe would also be a paid-for service and – prices were currently being trialled at £5 per record and £2.50 per record for universities and colleges.

The group agreed the new products would be of benefit to sector.

A copy of the presentation would be attached to the meeting minutes.

DC
DG033

06/15/M1 Higher Education Data & Information Improvement Programme (HEDIIP) update

Mike Spink discussed paper DG/15/000 which focused on the three main initiatives in HEDIIP:

New subject coding system

This is a replacement for the existing JACs coding system, as discussed in detail at the October meeting. UCAS was making strong recommendations to the project to ensure the new system was fit for purpose and future proof. It was anticipated that the proposed prototype would go out for national consultation in spring 2015.

Unique Learner Number (ULN)

More widespread adoption of the ULN was being promoted by the HEDIIP Team. It had been decided that UCAS should not allocate the ULN as HEDIIP investigations had concluded this was not a viable option given the current processes associated with the ULN allocation. UCAS was in agreement that the ULN has a lot to offer applicants – by improving the learner journey significantly and having the option of pre-populating the application with information. However, this would be dependent on UCAS' ability to validate the ULN at the start of the application process. The group agreed it would be vital for UCAS to carry out validation and a clear set of parameters needed to be in place to ensure the accuracy of the ULN. Currently only 12% of applications included the ULN – due to many reasons including the applicant being unaware of it.

Data capabilities

This was a new work stream, producing a framework and resources to enable individual providers to assess their Data Lifecycle Management (DLM). It would be a free tool which would assess the different data maturity scores and look at the outcomes for each level, so providers could see which level they were.

The perception of providers was that they may not be as mature with the data as they had previously thought. Therefore, this would be a way of reviewing and highlighting individual processes, which had previously uncovered numerous different practices. UCAS was assisting in the validation of this free tool, as any improvement to data quality would benefit the sector as a whole.

action

Members noted that the ability to benchmark data maturity would be really valuable. However, some concerns were raised about whether this was unfair since some providers have already invested considerable sums of their own funds, giving them a perceived competitive advantage. The group was advised that the intention was only to provide benchmarking tools, and it would then be for providers to decide what they did with the results. Realistically if some of the benefits of HEDIIP were to be realised, many providers would need to strengthen how they governed and managed data.

The group asked that these initiatives were also raised at the regional meetings by the Relationship Managers so the sector was aware of these developments.

07/15/M1 Education department data and the UCAS contextual data service

Carys Fisher, Policy Executive, joined the meeting to discuss paper DG/15/003 on contextual data.

Contextual data and information was any data used by universities and colleges which put attainment in the context of the circumstances in which it had been obtained. This typically included educational, geo-demographic, socio-economic background data and information about an individual's circumstances. In response to requests from the HE sector, UCAS introduced a contextual data service in 2012. There was no charge for this service but providers were required to agree to conditions of usage before access was granted.

The group raised the issue of the quality of schools data, as this severely limited the usefulness of UCAS' contextual data, as discussed in October. UCAS' decision not to invest in legacy systems meant that improvements in the quality of schools data (beyond focusing on communications channels) would need to await systems redevelopment.

The group requested to have contextual data presented in a meaningful way, including the national average of the country field and the progression to HE data, as well as providing guidance to understand the data once it has been issued. The group was reminded that this has been discussed previously and the DfE did not provide national averages information. One member thought that this was not the case. UCAS would investigate this as well as looking at if it was possible to provide progression data to providers on an Apply centre basis, e.g. data on numbers of applications, offers and acceptances.

CF
DG034

Paul Ashby highlighted an issue with contextual data at the University of Birmingham stating that it had been unavailable for a while but was unsure if this was a problem at the university or at UCAS. Louise Cyprien agreed to investigate and report back.

LC
DG035

The group was informed that a recent SPA survey on contextual data was due to be opened shortly on the SPA website, and they were encouraged to respond.

08/15/M1 UCAS Teacher Training data quality challenges

Fiona Watts, Teacher Training Relationship Manager, joined the meeting to discuss paper DG/15/004. Fiona outlined her role and responsibilities for lead schools and SCITTs and the on-boarding processes for UCAS Teacher Training (UTT).

The group was informed that data for UCAS Teacher Training was provided by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) rather than collected directly from training providers. NCTL data collection and management processes had caused challenges for UCAS, particularly in relation to contacting the right people at training providers, advertising providers using their preferred names, and verifying training programme information.

The group asked if there was a Yammer group for UCAS Teacher Training. Although this would be a very useful way of communicating, due to the large number of training providers and schools involved there were concerns that it could be too cumbersome to manage.

A joint data working group had been established, to provide a forum for operational colleagues from UCAS and NCTL to work together to ensure joint information, transfer, analysis and interpretation of data was aligned and clearer guidance was produced. Procedures for the exchange of operational data between the two organisations were also being standardised.

It was noted that the group was slightly disheartened to read a paper with numerous fundamental issues which they believe should have been tackled beforehand. However, Fiona confirmed that, as this was the first year of UCAS Teacher Training, issues had been identified and fixes put in place; lessons had been learnt and would be built upon for the future.

Wendy Webster highlighted that some data had been lost in the transition from GTTR to UCAS for the Scottish HEPs. This would be investigated and was potentially easy to resolve.

FW/LC
DC036

09/15/M1 Any other business

Equality characteristics

Ben Jordan, Policy Executive, joined the meeting to discuss paper DG/15/005 on equality characteristics, following recent changes made to the collection of data relating to an applicant's sex and gender. After strong feedback from representative groups it was identified that the wording of the changed question

could potentially cause offence, and it was therefore changed and the help text revised.

Ideally, UCAS would like to add a third option to the gender question, but the cost of making the change on legacy systems was excessive. UCAS would address this in its systems redevelopment.

A group member sought clarification as to whether the changes made by UCAS were still providing accurate data for use in the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record return. UCAS responded that it thought this was the case.

Post-meeting note: Daniel Farrell, University of St Andrews, sought clarification from HESA as to whether these changes were providing accurate data for use in the HESA student record return. Indications from HESA suggest this is not the case, and a joint UCAS-HESA statement was subsequently produced:

For the 2015 application cycle, UCAS introduced additional questions into Apply regarding a range of protected characteristics. Upon the launch of these changes UCAS receive feedback from applicants, particularly those from the trans community, that the wording of the question was potentially offensive and discouraging to some applicants. In light of this feedback, UCAS made additional changes to the questions asked in UCAS Apply.

*Following discussions between HESA and UCAS, HESA has decided that the question asked in UCAS Apply does not satisfy requirements for the Student and AP records and have therefore requested it is not supplied as part of the UCAS Data for HESA (*j) transaction going forward. UCAS will continue to provide the data to institutions for their own internal monitoring.*

UCAS was working with representative bodies to ensure consistency and clear representation of the diverse range of applicants, so nobody was deterred from applying and no offence caused. UCAS would liaise with HESA, Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) to discuss sector-wide definitions and gain future direction.

The group was satisfied that equality was being dealt with appropriately and effectively, although it was noted that at some point in the future there could be a requirement for UCAS to collect this data from EU and international applications, as well as home applicants.

Confidentiality of Data Group papers

The group queried the recent issue of Data Group papers which highlighted their confidentiality. The group was concerned as they needed to discuss the content of

action

the papers within their peers and felt that this was not possible due to the security markings.

It was confirmed that some of the documents discussed in the Data Group meeting were of a sensitive nature and not for sharing with the wider sector, but levels of confidentiality needed to be made more explicit within documentation. It was agreed that in future a note would be made on documents indicating where content was confidential and the extent to which group members could discuss and share this with others.

HT/DC
DG037

The group also asked if they could receive supporting papers for the meeting earlier, so they could engage and consult with their colleagues prior to the meeting. It was agreed to try to deliver Data Group papers for consultation and consideration as soon as they were available.

10/15/M1 Date of next meeting

It was agreed to hold the next Data Group meeting mid-June and potentially hold a Data Group 'brainstorming' session beforehand. Once dates had been agreed, Denise Chaffer would issue meeting invitations.

DC
DG038

It was agreed that the June agenda should include an update on digital acceleration, a discussion about HEDIIP (inviting Andy Youell to attend), and an item following up on the data-related items stemming from the international consultation. The group asked for papers to be circulated earlier to enable consultation more widely with their colleagues.

The group was encouraged to submit any items they would like to see for discussion on the agenda in good time.

ALL
DG039

Minutes

SEAG/15/M1

Secondary Education Advisory Group meeting
held on Friday 30 January 2015, 11:00 – 14:30, in the Boardroom at UCAS.

Chair:	Steve McArdle	Durham Johnson Comprehensive School
Attendees:	Alison Woolley Anna Rogers Beth Linklater Emma Bell Guy Nobes Hilary Munday Jan Ellis Justine Hale Mhairi Moore Sir Mike Griffiths Mike Williams Nick Spring Ruth Greenhalgh Sally Armstrong	Sixth Form College, Farnborough Tonbridge School Queen Mary's College, Hampshire Stratford Girls' Grammar School Marlborough College Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe Career Development Institute Cheltenham Ladies' College School Leaders Scotland Association of School & College Leaders Bournside School & Sixth Form College, Cheltenham Felsted School, Essex Sevenoaks School (via telephone) Bishop Wordsworth's School
Apologies:	Jane Mackay Philip Davis Stuart Newton	South Wilts Grammar School for Girls St Cyre's School, Penarth Anglo European School
UCAS in attendance:	Amy Hough Ben Jordan Clare Cozens Denise Chaffer Fiona Johnston Louise Evans Mike Spink	Marketing Channel Manager Senior Policy Executive Scheme Delivery Owner Groups and Forums Administrator National Partnership Manager Head of Adviser Experience Data Architect

SEAG/A1/01 Welcome and apologies

Steve McArdle, Chair, and Louise Evans, Head of Adviser Experience at UCAS, welcomed the group to the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. Ruth Greenhalgh joined the meeting via conference phone. The apologies were noted.

SEAG/A1/02 Minutes and action log from the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as an accurate and true reflection of the previous meeting.

The action log was discussed:

SEAG001 Schools visits – Louise Evans, Head of Adviser Experience, informed the group that four visits had taken place so far and that Andrew Hargreaves, Director of Marketing Communications, was keen to carry out more. Steve McArdle encouraged the group to make contact with Andrew to arrange visits and asked the schools who had already undertaken a visit to publicise this and reassure the sector that this is not an ‘Ofsted style inspection’ but an opportunity to ask questions and build relationships. Hilary Munday, Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, informed the group that they had recently had a visit from Andrew and found it to be very useful and informative. Hilary also highlighted that it would be useful to have a thematic report collating information from each visit to inform the sector of common issues and opinions. Louise stated that all schools are different with different needs and issues, but agreed to collate the information and issue a bullet point list to the sector highlighting these. The group asked for Andrew Hargreaves’ contact information to be put in the action log. DC SEAG001

SEAG020 FE representatives – No responses had been received. Steve informed the group he had sent out requests within the sector and Emma Bell, Stratford Girls’ Grammar School, had raised the issue in the Warwickshire network, but as yet there was no uptake.

SEAG021 Applications on deadline day – Clare Cozens, Scheme Delivery Owner, informed the group that monitoring had begun in January 2015. Clare reported that on 12 January an email was issued to 60 schools who had over 10 applications completed but had not yet been submitted, with one school having over 250 yet to be submitted. Following this email prompt, a further 600 applications were submitted. Clare noted it appeared to be independent applicants that left submissions to the last minute. The group found this information very useful and Clare confirmed this will continue to be monitored next year to gain a comparison and highlight any repeat offenders. Louise Evans also informed the group that next year UCAS will be more supportive of new centres – particularly overseas – to enable them to understand UCAS processes and deadlines more effectively. Guidance is currently being put together and will be launched in 2016. These materials will be rolled out to

existing and new centres. A webinar facility and online solution will also be introduced to enable training to be accessed by all advisers, especially international.

Alison Woolley, Sixth Form College Farnborough, suggested a 'buddying' system to share resources and information. The group agreed this would be a good idea. Fiona Johnston, National Partnership Manager, suggested there could be an opt-in box on the registration form to be part of the buddying scheme, to see what the uptake would be. This would also state the access and contribution to the scheme in order to understand the level of assistance required.

SEAG030 Pay and send terminology – Amy Hough, Marketing Channel Manager, stated there had not been a change in the wording but the help text had been amended to explain this better. A factsheet has been produced and a web chat has also been carried out.

SEAG031 Individual event registration – Several members of the group stated that they are currently trialling this and so far it had worked well. Louise Evans, Head of Adviser Experience, said that she would welcome further feedback at future meetings.

SEAG/A1/03 Operational update

Clare Cozens, Scheme Delivery Owner, gave the group an update on operations.

Clare informed the group that the 15 January deadline was successful and the 18:00 deadline worked well. The lead up to the day was smooth with minimal IT incidents, and the incidents that did occur were resolved quickly. There was also a big communications drive to applicants on not leaving applications to the last minute, to encourage early completion and submission. Figures for 15 January deadline are:

- 140,000 applications were submitted during the week of the deadline
- 40,000 were submitted on 14 January
- 50,000 submitted on 15 January
- A total of just under 600,000 applications were submitted in total
- Overall, there was a 2% increase in applications
- There was a 1% increase in UK applicants
- A 7% increase in EU applicants
- A 3% increase in applicants from outside the EU

There had been some concerns due to bad weather where four schools were affected by power outages. UCAS worked directly with the schools concerned to ensure applicants were not disadvantaged, and to ensure the applications were submitted and considered as 'on time'.

The group raised the question of age profile of the applications received. Fiona Johnston reported the breakdown of figures in relation to age:

- Under 18 applications up 6%

- Aged 18 applications up 4%
- Aged 19 applications up 1%
- Aged 20-24 applications down 3%
- Aged 25-29 applications up 1%
- Aged 30-34 applications down 3%
- Aged 35+ applications down 2%

Clare reported the change freeze remained in order to make system changes. However, 'legal sex' has now been replaced with 'gender' following sector feedback. A communication has been issued to applicants detailing this change and highlighting if changes were needed to their applications. Changes for 2016 are well underway, however there are some concerns over a couple of potential legal requirements, which are currently being investigated.

Clare stated that the launch of search will be at the beginning of May, followed by Apply for advisers and then Apply for applicants. Clare asked the group if it was beneficial to launch Apply early and the group were in full agreement. The launch dates have not yet been agreed. Once they have been, this will be communicated to the sector.

The new UCAS.com website was launched successfully on 22 January and has received positive feedback.

SEAG/A1/04 Qualification reform and UCAS survey

Ben Jordan, Senior Policy Executive, joined the meeting to deliver a presentation to the group on the recent results of the UCAS survey on A Level reform.

Ben reported at the previous Secondary Education Advisory Group meeting held in November 2014, that there would be a survey running on what the sector intentions were on the AS/A Level reforms. The survey was carried out and a report was released which gained significant online and print media coverage, and was also issued to the HE Minister Greg Clarke and Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan. The report is also available on UCAS.com. Ben said Ofqual had reported they did not have an evidence base of this significance and would therefore be using this information in their own intelligence.

The survey was issued to 2,700 schools and received 500 responses which could be analysed. The main findings were as follows:

- Two thirds of schools and colleges who responded to the survey indicated they would offer the AS in some form, and just over half would offer AS examinations in all reformed subjects they offer. Leaving aside those who are undecided, if this picture was to be extrapolated across all English schools and colleges, it would mean about one third of them will potentially have some

learners applying to higher education without an AS qualification from September 2016.

- Schools and colleges that have 200 or more students enrolled on level 3 programmes are more likely (56%) to offer an AS in all subjects than schools with fewer than 200 (48%). This may be associated with funding and staffing resources.
- Independent schools are less likely to offer an AS in all reformed subjects (42%) than academies (56%).
- Independent schools are less likely to offer the AS in any of the reformed subjects, with just under a third of respondents indicating this position.
- 64% intend to revisit their decision regarding the AS in 2017.

The survey highlights the key drivers in this decision. The most frequent response for all school types collectively and individually is 'other', showing the diversity of considerations for schools and colleges. This is followed by university and college requirements as the second most common driver for decisions regarding the provision of the AS. However, this is more likely to be a primary consideration for independent schools than for academies or other state schools. Funding of AS qualifications does not appear to be a consideration for independent schools, with the majority of independent school respondents indicating this is their lowest ranked decision-making factor.

Just over two thirds of providers think that A level participation will remain similar. However, just under a quarter of respondents feel that A level participation will decline. Of these respondents, 78% are from schools and colleges classified as academies or state schools. These are also the centre types that are more likely to offer alternative qualifications, such as BTECs. There are concerns in the sector that this reform may change again once the general election has taken place.

The group stated that the HE sector needs to be fully aware and accommodating to ensure that candidates are not disadvantaged in any way due to misunderstandings within schools, whilst maintaining fairness and transparency is the key to success of the changes.

ASCL members encouraged Ben to engage with Graham Stewart from the Education Select Committee, which Ben agreed to do. It was also suggested to have Mike Nicholson, Chair of HELOA, in the group. This had been previously investigated, however Mike was unable to attend several of the meetings. Louise Evans agreed to pursue this further.

BJ
SEAG034

LE
SEAG035

Ben stated the qualification reforms will be an interim recommendation pending further development, and schools will be encouraged to state their intentions on their website. This will also be revisited and reviewed in 2017, carrying out further surveys to ascertain any changes and trends in the sector.

Action

Ben informed the group that a qualification bulletin would be produced and issued UK-wide. Communications will be issued at the beginning of February to inform the sector about what is currently happening and future considerations. Ben will also attend various events and conferences to raise awareness of the reforms and gain feedback from the sector.

Further details of this report can be found on the UCAS website:

<https://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-unpacking-qualification-reform-jan-15.pdf>

Ben also highlighted that SPA had also carried out work on the qualification reforms and this can be found on their website.

A copy of the presentation given to the group will be issued with the meeting minutes.

DC
SEAG036

Steve McArdle stated that the report was very informative and encouraged the group to review it. The group welcomed this report and thanked Ben for his efforts.

SEAG/A1/05 Tariff update and schools definitions

Ben delivered another presentation to the group on the new Tariff update and schools definitions. The current definitions used by UCAS for schools are:

- Academy
- Further education
- Grammar
- Independent
- Sixth form college
- State
- Other

Many respondents have difficulty putting themselves into just one category. Ben asked the group for their suggestions for the way forward. The majority of the group felt unsure how to define themselves in one particular definition, as many fell into several. It was also noted that some schools are academically selective but might not admit to it.

Some of the group were keen that the data should not be fed into a form that can be used politically, as the media perspective conflates independent with wealthy. Ben agreed to attend the next Secondary Education Advisory Group meeting with a final revised list of definitions for consideration and approval.

BJ / DC
SEAG037

Tariff update

Ben showed the group the new Tariff video which has been produced. The group enjoyed the video and found it very informative and a useful way to communicate to

the sector, but commented that the animation was too fast and needed to be slowed down. They would also like links of where to go next included at the end of the video.

Ben informed the group that the Tariff calculator had been produced and launched on the website, to help applicants to work out their Tariff points. It includes a clear warning stating the applicant must contact the relevant HEP to clarify their requirements.

It was anticipated there would not be any significant issues with the new Tariff points, and it may only be applicants who are aware of the previous Tariff system that could become confused. The group envisaged that after a year of the new Tariff, just a revised list would be required and this would become the norm.

Steve was concerned that old Tariff points might make sites such as UNISTATS confusing to students researching options.

Ben highlighted to the group that there are new Tariff factsheets and FAQs available on the UCAS website.

Louise Evans informed the group that the Professional Development Team will be delivering training on the new Tariff within the sector. These sessions will consist of a free two hour basic training session taking place UK-wide (dates confirmed on the website) and will be available to anybody who would like to understand the changes and differences in the new Tariff. It was also anticipated that training would take place in Scotland, however this date has yet to be agreed. Ideally this will tie in with one of the Scottish HE events. Louise also informed the group that she will be going to The Student Room in March to train their staff.

SEAG/A1/06 Higher Education Data and Information Improvement Programme (HEDIIP)

Mike Spink, Data Architect, joined the meeting to talk through paper SEAG/15/001, to discuss the HEDIIP initiative to implement the Unique Learner Number (ULN) in HE. The benefits (as documented by HEDIIP) were also shared and include benefits for learners in their education journey.

Mike reported that currently only around 10% of applicants who should have a ULN include it in their application. The group said that the student is already using a number of different reference numbers – for example the exam candidate number – so the lack of the ULN could be because the student is unaware of the relevance or use of it. Several questions were raised by the group including who would ‘own’ the ULN, i.e., who would be responsible for generating the number and maintaining accuracy of the data and system. In some cases where students have taken some GCSEs early, this has resulted in two different ULNs being allocated to the same person.

Action

Many students are unaware of their own ULN. The group questioned whether this could be linked with either the National Insurance (NI) numbers or NHS numbers. Mike stated that the starting point for the HEDIIP work was that the ULN is the unique identifier of choice for this purpose, and that it already has extensive coverage across English, Welsh and Northern Irish state funded schools, but not in Scotland where they use the Scottish Candidate Number (SCN). Overseas students and students at independent schools are not likely to have a ULN.

The group questioned whether a student could opt out of having a ULN. Mike stated that he was not aware of an opt-out clause where ULN allocation is compulsory, but believes that students are able to determine who the information can be shared with. Mike stated that at present, there is a reluctance in UCAS to make the ULN a mandatory field as this could obstruct / penalise some applicants, and this is not the desired outcome. MS SEAG038

The group felt that students are not likely to provide the ULN until they can see specific benefits to themselves from supplying it. Mike mentioned that a number possibilities were being discussed, including UCAS offering students the ability to pre-populate their application with existing qualifications based on the ULN.

SEAG/A1/07 Clearing Working Group

Fiona Johnston, National Partnership Manager, recently attended the Clearing Working Group meeting on 26 January, on behalf of Andy Frampton who is currently on paternity leave. Tom Kidd, University of Gloucestershire, was also due to attend the meeting to discuss the Clearing Working Group, but was unable to attend.

Fiona gave the group a brief history and background of the Clearing Working Group, stating that the group is HE sector led but has UCAS in attendance.

A huge amount of feedback has been sought from the sector which has identified several clear themes. At present, the Clearing Working Group is developing four alternative models to the current Clearing process, which will be submitted to the sector for consideration and refinement between January and March. However, it was noted these may not denote the final outcome as the group are keen to engage with the entire sector and cover all bases to ensure the new model is fit for purpose and sustainable, with the changing nature of applicant behaviour.

Fiona informed the group that the level of Records of Prior Acceptance (RPA) where the applicant completely evades the UCAS Clearing process is currently at 40% (i.e., 50,000 applicants per year) and this is likely to increase due to the removal of student number controls.

Fiona handed the group voting cards and asked several quick fire questions to the group, which were:

Q1. My school/college would like universities to list vacancies throughout the cycle, as a live and dynamic listing.

Yes = 15

No = 0

Q2. My school/college believes that only providers should be able to release applicants from their UF choice if they wish to go elsewhere.

Yes = 1

No = 14

Q3. My school/college believes that applicants should be able to request a release from their UF choice via Track for provider approval.

Yes = 1

No = 14

Q4. My school/college believes that applicants should be able to initiate a release from their UF choice, which carries multiple warnings but does not require provider approval.

Yes = 15

No = 0

Q5. My school/college believes that applicants should be able to release themselves from their UF choice via Track in one step, without provider approval.

Yes = 1

No = 14

Q6. My school/college would like providers to be able to make conditional offers throughout the year, if relevant for the applicant.

Yes = 15

No = 0

Q7. My school/college believes that the terminology related to applications post 30 June needs no alteration.

Yes = 15

No = 0

Q8. My school/college believes applicants should be able to accept change course offers as soon as their results are published.

Yes = 14

No = 1

Q9. My school/college believes applicants should be allowed up to 31 August to fulfil outstanding conditions.

Yes = 15

No = 0

Q10. My school/college believes applicants should fulfil their conditions earlier than 31 August.

Yes = 0

No = 15

Q11. My school/college believes applicants should have up to the start of the providers' term to fulfil outstanding conditions.

Yes = 0

No = 15

Q12. My school/college believes that CI/UI choices should decline automatically when a UF choice is present.

Yes = 0

No = 15

Q13. My school/college believes that Adjustment is a misunderstood and confusing process for applicants.

Yes = 10

No = 5

Q14. My school/college believes that Adjustment is an unnecessary process.

Yes = 6

No = 9

Q15. My institution would support the replacement of 'classic' Clearing and Adjustment with one new process.

Yes = 15

No = 0

Fiona thanked the group for their participation and agreed to feedback all the responses to the Clearing Working Group.

FJ
SEAG039

SEAG/A1/09 Any other business

HMC/ASCL admissions concerns

It was reported that there are some concerns over admissions and that schools and colleges require further support. It was noted that as a result of curriculum changes post-application, some applicants have results which are missing or misrepresented. There needs to be a clearer understanding amongst applicants that they are likely to miss out on securing places through near-miss accepts to CI, or through late entry into

Action

Clearing, whilst held in limbo by a CF HEP awaiting such qualifications pending which are not correct. It was suggested that since offers depend on the candidate's qualification claims, not just those included in the offer, that a clear statement of this was needed in Track. Any qualification changes need to be negotiated in advance with the HEPs the applicant holds offers with. DC/FJ SEAG040

The group highlighted the growing concern of unconditional offer making, particularly with the incentive of accommodation if the applicant accepts. Fiona Johnston stated this issue is noted on the applicant survey which received over 40,000 responses, and would be included as an agenda item at the next meeting.

Widget testing

Amy Hough, Marketing Channel Manager, agreed to send an email link out to the group regarding widget testing for feedback. AH SEAG041

Parents evening webinars

Amy Hough, Marketing Channel Manager, agreed to send an email link out to the group regarding parents evening webinars for feedback. AH SEAG042

Next meeting

It was agreed to hold the next meeting in early June, avoiding 24 June. Denise Chaffer to ascertain a suitable date with the group and send out meeting invitations. DC SEAG043

Minutes

TG/15/M1

Technical Group meeting

held on Tuesday 17 February, 10:30-15:00, at UCAS, Cheltenham

Chair:	Peter Service	Newcastle University
Attendees:	Fiona Sanders	University of Leicester
	Garry Main	University of the Highlands & Islands (video-conferencing)
	Helen MacCarthy	University of Hull
	Helen Savigar	University of Portsmouth
	Joy Bate	Liverpool John Moores University
	Laurence Dupont	Aberystwyth University
	Lisa Machin	Nottingham Trent University
	Liz Shillito	Lancaster University
	Mary Hill	Sheffield Hallam University
	Richard Wilcox	Coventry University
	Rob Stanton	University of Sheffield
	Tanja Paisley	The University of Strathclyde (video-conferencing)
	Susanne Peake	Southampton University
Apologies:	Ashley Sargeant	University of Greenwich
	Graham Rees	University of Leeds
	Jonathan Richardson	University of East Anglia
	Phil Wilkinson	Queens University Belfast
	Simon Baker	Birmingham City University
	Sue Gemmill	Brunel AC
	Tom Richey	University College London
UCAS in attendance:	Adam Glaudot	Technical Relationship Manager
	Andy Gillett	Head of IT Engagement
	Andy Irving	Head of Service Assurance
	Anneka Lewis	HEP Experience Manager
	Babs Kilmister	Head of Admissions Delivery
	Beth Hayes	Digital Media Manager
	Chris Wallace	Head of Product Management
	Denise Chaffer	Groups and Forums Administrator
	Fatuma Mahad	Director of Operations
	Kalvyn Griffiths	Technical Relationship Manager
	Mark Woodfield	Head of Solution Delivery
	Tom Gromski	Technical Relationship Manager

A1/15/01 Welcome and apologies

Peter Service, new meeting Chair, welcomed the group to the meeting and the group welcomed new member Mary Hill, Sheffield Hallam University. The apologies were noted.

A1/15/02 Minutes and actions from the last meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate and true representation of the meeting.

The open items of the action log were discussed:

TG015 testing schedule – Adam Glaudot, Technical Relationship Manager, confirmed that discussions had taken place regarding test environments. Therefore, it was agreed to close this action.

TG037 agenda items – Peter Service, Chair, reiterated the request to the group to submit suggestions for agenda items to aid discussions.

A1/15/03 Operational update

Following the recent departure of James Munson, UCAS' IT Director, Fatuma Mahad, Director of Operations, informed the group she had now taken over this role on an interim basis, and had full accountability for IT at UCAS.

A summary was given of recent operations activity since last October. These included:

- delivery of UKCAT and GAMSAT results
- implementation of a number of changes in admissions delivery 2015
- significant activities in Awarding Body Linkage (ABL) and Course Collect 2016
- successful launch of the Oxford Summer Schools

However, the biggest achievement was around the 15 January deadline – when application processing was much quicker than in previous years.

At present there was a heavy focus on launching the application services for the 2016 cycle. This was anticipated to take place in May, however there were significant regulatory changes that require implementation.

Confirmation and Clearing (C&C) 2015 preparations were well underway, with Dry Run 1 and 2 taking place in the next three months. It was confirmed that once the plans were in place for C&C 2015 these would be shared with the sector, to ensure communications remained open and transparent.

Andy Gillett, Head of IT Engagement, highlighted to the group that the Admission Conference was taking place in March, and there would be a specific discussion on the expected usage of link products for this year. This would be mainly aimed at admissions staff, to enable UCAS to plan effectively for potential systems usage. The group was encouraged to give feedback on this.

The group was informed that the main areas of focus within IT at present were recruiting and resourcing for current gaps in the business unit – to employ the correct technical expertise to take the business forward.

Infosys service review

In response to queries raised at the Technical Group meeting in October, a working group had been established to ensure that the Infosys service desk gave a stable and reliable service, and its staff had the correct expertise to ensure a good customer experience.

Andy Irving, Head of Service Assurance, outlined to the group that, over the last year UCAS had experienced several challenges with the services provided by Infosys, along with significant major incidents at the end of last year. These were addressed at a key executive meeting, and robust discussions with Infosys took place covering the service levels, service management, monitoring, quality of the helpdesk, incident and problem management, application management, end-user computing, infrastructure and security. This resulted in Infosys being put on a service improvement plan and a key list of priorities being drawn. Significant improvements had been made and, although there were some outstanding actions, it was anticipated these would be resolved by the end of March.

In readiness for C&C 2015 Infosys had increased its staff on- and off-shore. Networks and security staff had also been increased and knowledge transfer sessions were in place. Sachin Jois, the new Infosys C&C Manager was introduced to the group. Sachin had already taken part in detailed planning sessions for C&C and confirmed that Infosys was committed to giving further resources to ensure it gave customers a satisfactory service.

It is intended that Infosys exit the service improvement plan at the end of March, once the exit criteria had been met. The next steps would be to:

- maintain the improved level of service through revised KPIs
- undertake a more detailed baseline review of services
- identify the next areas for improvement
- continue with remediation activities focusing on areas which required improvement before C&C 2015
- continue with the advance planning in preparation for C&C 2015

	action
The group raised the issue of the time taken to install patches and the impact this had on admissions teams who then have to reschedule. At present there was a backlog of patches to be installed. However, the intention was to increase the amount installed and reduce the amount of time taken on outages and the impact on customers. Andy Irving agreed to liaise with the UCAS Change and Release Manager to amend timings and schedules so as to minimise the impact on admissions staff.	AI TG041
Andy Gillett suggested that Infosys accompanied the Technical Relationship Managers during some of their visits, to gain the customer perspective.	AG TG042
Fatuma recommended that David Print, Senior Project Manager, was invited to the next Technical Group meeting, to give an update on C&C preparations and plans.	DC TG043
It was also suggested to have a focus session on C&C as an agenda item at the next meeting.	DC TG044

A1/15/04 Technical support experience improvements

Andy Gillett, Head of IT Engagement, tabled the UCAS incident communications process and provider support experience papers for information and review. Andy outlined the internal processes in place and the three stages of UCAS' external incident communications process. Since the previous Technical Group meeting in October a service improvement team had been established to meet fortnightly – Andy and Babs Kilmister, Head of Admissions Delivery, were members of the team.

The group reported issues with the recent ODBC outage – members had not been informed of this, and only discovered the outage upon liaising with other providers. The group mentioned the recent certificates issue, they were initially apprehensive but pleased that this was resolved. The group also reported instances of calls taking several days to be resolved and the helpdesk asking for screenshots, which in certain circumstances were not appropriate.

The group stated it would like to see more regular updates of incidents rather than a monthly bulletin, as these often got missed. Andy Gillett informed the group that in some instances the initial understanding of the issue could change and the wrong facts communicated, therefore a full root cause and analysis took place to identify this. However, the group was in agreement that they would like to know sooner rather than later, even though the root cause might change.

The introduction of an online portal, which had been considered at previous Technical Group meetings, was discussed. This would be developed in conjunction with Infosys, with the premise to ask for nominations from the group to take part in testing the portal. The initial timescales were to start discussions in early March, then to work through scenario planning sessions to identify what the customer requirements were.

Babs Kilmister highlighted to the group that the aim was to get a product which satisfied customer needs based on their feedback, not UCAS' interpretation of what customers required. Joy Bate, Helen McCarthy, Mary Hill and Liz Shillito all volunteered themselves to take part in the online portal testing, with Peter Service suggesting individual technical managers should also be involved.

UCAS was implementing 11 pre-configured service request questions to support the diagnosis and speed up the time to resolve requests and incidents. The aim was to introduce the revised questions by early March.

Weekly service desk performance meetings were being held at UCAS. If any members of the group experienced issues with service desk performance, they were asked to escalate them through their Technical Relationship Manager, who would pass this on to be raised at the weekly meeting.

It was also suggested that UCAS should visit providers' service desks to review their ways of working and processes.

The group agreed that the incident communications process was a step in the right direction.

A1/15/05 HEP test data environment update

Adam Glaudot, Technical Relationship Manager, gave a presentation on HEP test data environments. Since October 2014 there had been updates to HESA data, 2015 admissions cycle changes, xml-link SHA-2 certificate, and further continual service improvements based on feedback received.

UCAS was aiming to extend its testing capability, by introducing an additional environment set in Clearing. The group agreed that, once the additional environment was live, it would like to see the current environment utilised to test the 2016 cycle, but reiterated the need for this to be in collaboration with software providers.

The group questioned the new Tariff testing – Tom Gromski, Technical Relationship Manager, informed the group that Tariff consultation was currently taking place and the outcome of this consultation should be released in summer 2015. The approach would be communicated as soon as it was known.

The group was informed that UCAS would like to have the last Friday of every month to perform maintenance, ensuring the service was aligned with production. The suggested maintenance window was for 08:00 – 18:00. The group agreed with the proposal, and also agreed that the data for the second environment was cloned from the current environment.

A1/15/06 ucas.com feedback

Beth Hayes, Digital Media Manager, and Anneka Lewis, HEP Manager Experience, joined the meeting to discuss ucas.com. The new UCAS website was successfully launched on 22 January. This followed extensive redevelopment and redesign, along with the merging of all UCAS schemes into one destination to create a single learner journey and improve customer experience. The group was asked to review the provider section of ucas.com.

The new functions of the website were demonstrated and the group was informed that the left-hand navigation menu was currently under review. A more intelligent search facility had been implemented to improve the customer journey. The group was in agreement that the new website was a great improvement.

The group was asked to give any further feedback to website@ucas.ac.uk

A1/15/07 Digital acceleration

Chris Wallace, Head of Product Management, joined the meeting to introduce the group to digital acceleration. Rather than continue to make changes to existing legacy systems, which were highly resource intensive, UCAS was now investing in the development of new digital products and services, with the long-term aim to become a globally recognised destination for all postgraduate and undergraduate admissions services. Digital acceleration was not a replacement strategy, but a more aggressive stance for transforming the current UCAS technical estate; UCAS still aimed to deliver the goals of the CASE initiative discussed in October. UCAS was currently recruiting skilled IT experts to work on this, and it would not impact on operational delivery, particularly C&C 2015. UCAS also intended to work closely with customers throughout the planning, development, testing and implementation of the digital acceleration initiatives, to fully understand their needs and improve the learner experience.

An example was given to the group of a recent change to the gender question in Apply implemented following feedback from customers groups. This had cost £250,000 and required changes across 30 different systems, thus demonstrating that investment must cease on the legacy estate.

The admissions initiative was starting with the UCAS Postgraduate scheme, the intention being to test, innovate and build a new admissions service. This approach would enable UCAS to develop and test a new Apply service whilst minimising the risks to the larger Undergraduate scheme.

UCAS was committed to listening to its customers' needs – all developments would be user-focused and undergo extensive user-testing with providers, applicants and advisers. Regular engagement would take place with Relationship Managers, groups and forums, focus groups, working groups, Yammer, conferences and bulletins.

Engagement with providers, agencies and other official bodies would obtain direct feedback and gain a deeper understanding of the requirements of the sector. The needs of the postgraduate sector would be collected and collated by mid-March, when development and build would start.

Course Collect had been reviewed and considered against the aspirations of the business, and it had been deemed to be not fit for purpose. Therefore the product would be completely rebuilt as part of the digital acceleration strategy, in conjunction with UCAS' groups and forums.

The group stated it was imperative that external and in-house software suppliers were fully engaged in UCAS' digital acceleration. Andy Gillett reassured the group that, once the design of the new products had been agreed, the various software suppliers would be fully engaged to understand the implications and future plans.

A1/15/08 Agile development – new ways of working

Mark Woodfield, Head of Solution Delivery, joined the meeting to discuss agile development. Mark outlined UCAS' adoption of agile, which focused on quality fixed from the start. It enabled early and frequent releases which helped build confidence in the market, whilst being adaptable with clear visibility, and utilised the 'scrum' approach, enabling software teams to operate more effectively and efficiently.

As agile required a high degree of feedback, it was agreed that Mark would spend time with vendors and the Technical Group to understand the risks, issues and concerns within the sector, along with the advantages.

A copy of the agile presentation would be included with the minutes.

DC
TG046

A1/15/09 Groups & forums update

Denise Chaffer provided the group with the quarterly thematic report for the groups and forums, which gives an update of the main issues and topics of discussion raised in the last quarter.

A1/15/10 Any other business

Crossover between Technical and Data Groups

Andy Gillett informed the group that he had attended the Data Group meeting on 10 February and highlighted that, as services are developed, the need to understand data requirements and usage are fundamental. Andy would continue to be the link between the groups and asked if any members would like to nominate themselves to attend the

action

Data Group meetings to contact Andy or Peter directly via email on a.gillett@ucas.ac.uk or peter.service@newcastle.ac.uk

Post meeting note: Lisa Machin has stepped forward to act as the crossover between the Technical and Data Groups.

Meeting feedback

The group were in agreement that the meeting had been very useful with interesting discussions and feedback, and appreciated the regular and informative UCAS updates.

A1/15/11 Next meeting

Helen McCarthy offered to host the next Technical Group meeting at the University of Hull on Tuesday 16 June. Denise Chaffer would make the necessary arrangements and send a meeting invite out to the group.

DC
TG047