ACADEMIC REGISTRARS COUNCIL

Admissions Practitioners Group
Minutes of the Sixty-Eighth Meeting
Tavistock Room, Woburn House, 20 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9HQ
Friday 16th June 2017

Present: Martyn Annis (University of Brighton, Chair), Richard Emborg (University of Durham, Secretary),Claire Boyes (Birmingham City University), Denise Whitehart (Canterbury Christ Church University), Michelle Davis (Coventry University), Anne Wilson (Edge Hill University), Julie Fisher (Glasgow Caledonian University), Laura Harper (Harper Adams University College), Katy Robinson (King's College London), Matt Birkett (Lancaster University), Jeanette Eriksson (London Metropolitan University),Dave Norton (Loughborough University), Kodjo Taylor (Manchester Metropolitan University), Susan Allen (Middlesex University), Dawn Bell (Newcastle University), Michaela Artingstall (Newman University College), Alison Wilde (Nottingham Trent University), Laura Kishore (Oxford Brookes University), Sue Gemmill (Royal Holloway, University of London), Philip Bloor (Sheffield Hallam University), Dan Shaffer (SPA), Amy Smith (SPA), Carolyn Colaço-Monteiro (St George's, University of London), Sarah Gibb (St Mary's University Twickenham), Abbie English (Teesside University), Andrea Henrichfreise (The London School of Economics and Political Science), Vikki Cannon (The Royal Veterinary College), Peter Derrick (UCAS), Louise Evans (UCAS), Alexa Jones (UCAS), Bella Malins (UCL), Briony Galpin (University of Essex), Victoria Azubuine (University of Bedfordshire), Nicholas Ranford (University of Birmingham), Helen Basterra (University of Brighton), Helen Reed (University of Cambridge), Luke Gibbons (University of East Anglia), Jo Hamilton (University of Exeter), Jenny Ventris (University of Hertfordshire), Steven Holdcroft (University of Kent), Graham Rees (University of Leeds), Phil Dalby (University of Leicester), Julie Haveron (University of Lincoln), Louise Pritchett (University of Manchester), Ross Sands (University of Northampton), Rachel Gillam (University of Nottingham), Marianna Asatryan (University of Oxford), Samantha Drage (University of Reading), Liz Hunt (University of Sheffield), Joanne Bainbridge (University of Sunderland), Sam Matthews (University of Surrey), Rob Evans (University of Sussex), Gemma Prichard (University of the Arts London), Mike Youlton (University of Warwick), Dean Leow (University of West London), Kerry Fey (University of West of England), Gracie Hinitt (University of Worcester).

Apologies: Sue Metcalfe (Anglia Ruskin University), Jo Ladwa (Keele University), Joanne Tallentire (Queen Mary University of London), Jennifer Dwyer (Queen's University Belfast), Maxine Charlton (University of York), David Howells (University of Bath),Bob Savill (University of Chichester),Shane Collins (University of Dundee), Rebecca Gaukroger (University of Edinburgh), Judith Davison (University of Huddersfield), Kathy Olivant (University of Hull), Sarah Simms (University of the Creative Arts), Dave Haddock (University of Westminster), Alistair Garmendia (University of Winchester).

17.15   Welcome to New Members

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

Stephen Wiggins, Academic Registrar at Portsmouth, is the new Deputy Chair of APG. Stephen will attend the next APG meeting.

17.16   Apologies for absence

Apologies were noted from 14 institutions.

17.17 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2017 were approved as an accurate record.

17.18   Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

None raised.

17.19   UCAS update

Received: an update from the UCAS Head of Advisor and Provider Experience including responses to questions posed by members (APG/17/12).

Noted and discussed:

Latest news
- A continuing small decrease in overall applications at the March deadline
- UCAS forecast a lower number of students in Clearing compared to 2016
- 2017 cycle has progressed as planned, although RBD was moved.
- There is a new HEP3 test environment where HEPs can test from the applicant point of view
- PERS - available until 5pm today
- The new UCAS CEO, Clare Marchant, starts in post on 3 July. She has already been learning about some elements of UCAS
- Embargo zero breach training has now been rolled out and is available to all. Feedback has been both positive and negative.

Confirmation & Clearing
- UCAS has been running delivery confidence reviews and 'dance plans'
- There is uncertainty over whether a hung parliament and TEF results will affect applicant behaviour

Admissions Conference 2017
- The Conference went well, but there is a general feeling that there was less engagement and less buzz than recent conferences
- It was suggested this may be due to one of more of the following:
  - a shift in attendance with a growing proportion of staff new to admissions
  - people attending on their own who are therefore less likely to raise questions
  - lack of anonymity in SLiDO

- Some criticism from attendees that there was too much sharing of information and not enough sharing of best practice.

Direct Contact Service

- Has been expanded to recruit from EXTRA
- Current level of interest is the same as last year
- Contact through DCS 2017 is from 11am in the morning. This has been brought earlier as it is highly likely applicants will know results by then and understandably HEIs want to start this contact as soon as possible.

Policy update

- Noted that the Progression Pathways 2017 report has been published. This is the second report of the series and is a discussion paper, looking at how applicants progress, concentrating on certain prior qualifications, to support information, advice and guidance

ABL link activity

- More effort has been invested this year to get earlier notice of applicants not taking some or any exams, which is intended to result in fewer applicants with missing results in Confirmation
- UCAS is emailing applicants and advisers to achieve this.

Questions

Question. What is the number of offers and accepts (firm and insurance) made to and received from EU (non-UK) applicants this cycle compared to last cycle at sector level?
Answer. -7% offers and -6% accepts

Question. There have been a number of system failures recently. Can UCAS explain what has caused these and provide any reassurance that these are not a cause for concern?
Answer. No underlying link to developments or continued dependence on some historic systems, mostly due to errors by 3rd party suppliers.
Blank search in new search was overloading the system. This is now fixed.
Another cause of an outage was the whole system went down for a Cloud provider
UCAS confident that in C&C all will be ok. All major 3rd parties are on site in C&C to fix things quickly

Question. Data destinations - Roughly how much revenue is derived from supplying course listings data to third party search websites (such as 'Which'), given that we sometimes have concerns about how they display application rate data?
Answer. UCAS generates around £580k from courses data per year. A list of organisations can be found here at Data Destinations on the UCAS website.

Other questions
Questions. Could UCAS make training accessible for all users, e.g. subtitled?

Question. Has the zero breach embargo initiative led to changes in the terms of service?
Answer. No changes made. If there had been, there would have been a consultation period.

Question. Will self-release into Clearing be activated this year?
Answer. No, no change this year

Question. Regarding the Embargo: if you confirm an applicant has met the conditions of their offer based on BTec results, but the offer also includes the option to meet offer through an A Level as well, does it breach the embargo? HEIs need absolute clarity on this, especially if they are making tariff-based offers
Answer. Absolute clarity promised on this example.

ACTION: UCAS Head of Service Delivery

Noted that if the decision is made before the A level embargo period it is not a breach as exam boards will not have released the results to UCAS

Other:
APG members are asked to highlight to UCAS areas of Conference that could be better and also ideas about improvements. Feedback to be provided to UCAS Head of Advisor and Provider Experience.

ACTION: ARC APG members

It was suggested that more challenging debate would be good, rather than a training session, including UCAS bringing challenging issues they are grappling with
It was suggested that even modest changes in how an institution manages or delivers admissions to make improvements will be of interest in a session. It doesn't have to be ground-breaking.

17.20 UCAS Update
Received: an update from the UCAS Head of Service Delivery including demonstration of the recent developments (APG/17/10).

Search
- Product is all live
- Initially some teething problems, but now very stable
- Advertising opportunities: skyscrapers on side of the webpage are available but there are no plans to offer any other format
- There is a new global search bar. This has not caused problems with applicants landing in the wrong search tool
- Feedback from HEIs is encouraged: members should use the tab that is available on top right hand corner of the web page
- Current feedback suggests a wish for more filtering options, notably by qualification outcome
- SEO = search engine optimising
- Entry requirements filter: 2015 UCAS Board wanted to do this for applicants stating that learners have been consistently asking for it. UCAS recognises that it is a very contentious and complicated issue. Some ideas have been proposed, e.g. banding courses, but there is no consensus on how big or small the banding would be and concern that too wide will not be exact enough
  - Comments -
    - UCAS must include BTec, could you use tariff?

- How would it include mixed qualifications? (Answer - need to sort that in Collect for common combinations before looking at filter)
- Would rather do nothing than have a bad product
- It could be confusing for International and EU applicants. UCAS is undertaking work to guide applicants how to use filters
- HEIs should decide how our courses are displayed
- Can only search on what is declared on Collect at present
- Data set information is highly controversial - UCAS should be neutral, needs to be very carefully considered.
- Don't want to have too many filters too early on
- Duration of studies suggested as a filter. UCAS agreed to check where it is in the development schedule and feedback

ACTION: UCAS Head of Service Delivery

Collect
- UCAS is developing a live complete course dump of listings, in CSV, including entry requirements on fees
- HEIs can request the new style of report
- Download is the first stage on developments that will include upload as well via API
- UCAS have added more qualifications. If members want more, they should contact their relationship manager

HECOS
- UCAS building the ability to collect in the tool, expected for 2019 cycle
- It will still be an application code at the moment
- The hope is this code will eventually become hidden

Rollover
- UCAS working on how rollover will work
- Considering giving HEIs ability to do rollover as well as UCAS doing it. Planned to be in place by autumn 2017.
- Dated and Deadlines Working Group suggested a launch in March to align with recruitment activity. Seems acceptable for APG members

Application Management System
- UCAS is hoping to help applicants to state the exact qualification they are taking, working with UKNARIC etc. This will help deliver a better quality of data
- Trying to work out what is needed for UG and then roll out
- Beta version of AMS in HEP3, members are encouraged to take a look and feedback
- Much more guidance to applicants than before
- Possible consultation at Annual Provider Update meeting

TEF
- Feedback welcomed on the way that UCAS has displayed TEF rankings
- Webinars and events have been held, lots of one-to-ones

17.21 UCAS Members Survey
Received: detailed analysis of the latest member satisfaction survey from the UCAS Head of Advisor and Provider Experience (APG/17/11).

Noted and discussed:

- The survey was the lowest response rate ever. As any survey is only as good as the number of those participating there was a plea for more responses next time
- Parents Survey results sat higher in satisfaction than HEIs, as was applicants (95%)
- Less people thinking UCAS is better than last survey and more people thinking UCAS is worse. This is a concern for UCAS
- Lots of increased happiness for IT staff
- Others who were involved included planning, WP, Outreach - perhaps less contact with UCAS?
- UCAS recognise there is a job to do to convince people that UCAS is listening
- There is an improvement in satisfaction with UCAS products compared to 2015-16, but not all
- Free text comments have been received. UCAS is working out how to respond to these. Planned action so far is very high level
- UCAS has used additional comments e.g. from Relationship Managers to help identify themes
- Comments about the UCAS website included take down some content, make language less corporate
- Comments about communications included UCAS needing to be more consistent in using all channels and provide more feedback
- ARC APG Chair suggested members need to continue the discussion at a later date and constantly review the member experience
- Request for HEIs and UCAS to work together to challenge ourselves over this.

17.22   SPA considerations for applicants with criminal convictions

Received: a presentation from SPA on the updated SPA considerations for applicants with criminal convictions (APG/17/13).

Noted and discussed:

- It's a controversial topic; some academics are championing removal of question to support WP
- The updated considerations are available on the SPA website. It's a complicated procedural document
- Feedback from HEIs that the recommending flow chart is very helpful
- Noted that criminal convictions are more common amongst WP applications – HEIs therefore encouraged to ask themselves if their procedures might present a barrier to applicants
- 'Unlocking Potential' prompted SPA to review their guidance
- Members asked to provide SPA with examples of positive use of criminal conviction information, e.g. providing support during studies

ACTION: ARC APG members

- Suggested that a message that we are not judging the conviction but instead managing the risk is a good way of positively explaining the process
- Noted that the spent period differs between countries, as does standard and enhanced disclosures
- Three questions are the words to state in policy: is it relevant, is it spent, would it be filtered?
- A large numbers of convictions would not be filtered out and removed from all standard and enhance disclosures but others have to be cleared out
- Noted that the onus from applicants' view is not to declare

- Recommended to take a risk based approach as it helps show the thinking behind the decision
- Transition follow up is recommended, it shows that an HEI is supportive in its approach
- Next term SPA is planning on doing a toolkit module on dealing with applicants who declare a criminal conviction
- *Question*. Do applicants with pending conviction have to declare it or if they declare it should it be considered? *Answer*. In the UK people are innocent until proven guilty, so applicants do not need to declare before they are convicted. Recommended that HEIS should align with their policy for current students. However DBS check might bring the pending conviction. Suggested that HEIs include a statement about applicants who receive a conviction after application in the terms and conditions sent after the firm accept (example identified from Glasgow Caledonian). Has to be in terms and conditions re: CMA so that applicants agree to when they accept the offer.

Secretary's note: GCU statement is 'You must tell us about any relevant unspent criminal convictions which you receive at any point after you apply. This includes any relevant criminal convictions received after you have registered as a student until you cease to be a student registered on your Programme. You must disclose any such convictions as soon as possible to the Academic Registrar (academicregistrar@gcu.ac.uk). Our webpage at http://www.gcu.ac.uk/student/regulations/criminalconvictionsdeclaration/ explains what is meant by a relevant conviction'. Taken from: https://www.gcu.ac.uk/media/gcalwebv2/student/regulations/GCU_Student_Terms_and_Conditions_2016-17.pdf

- Members asked to volunteer to talk about how they deal with applicants with criminal convictions, especially if linking it to transition to student stage. Any volunteers should contact the Secretary of ARC APG.

ACTION: ARC APG members

17.23 SPA Update

Received: an update from the SPA Admissions Support Manager on current activities (APG/17/14).

Noted and discussed:

- Amy Smith has joined SPA
- Entry requirements guidance has been updated twice since February
- Confirmation and Clearing guidance is now a checklist document
- 42% drop in AS study according to OFQUAL. Mitigating circumstances requests for students affected by recent terror attacks and the Grenfell Fire are expected
- A request for examples of institutional practice in supporting Care Leavers to be provided to SPA

ACTION: ARC APG members

- The applicant experience guidance has been refreshed

17.24 HEFCE Guide to providing information to prospective undergraduate students

Discussed: the latest guidance published in March 2017 (APG/17/15).

Noted and discussed:

- We are being told what applicants want by HEFCE, sounds like OfS
- Annual Provider Review will expect you to meet this guidance
- There is a lot to include because KIS is going
- Best practice examples discussed
- Comments on sections:

- o Timetabling will be challenging
- o Entry requirements section was rushed, will be a new version in the Autumn
- o Course requirements - like prospectus entry
- o Module information - interesting caveats, very helpful
- o Teaching & Learning - not in KIS anymore, overall workload in KIS
- o Assessment = use KIS data
- o Course costs - course related costs can be challenging, e.g. dependent on the nature of the project
- Timescales is to be ready for September 2017
- Volunteers who do it well sought to speak at future ARC APG meeting. Any volunteers should contact the Secretary of ARC APG.

ACTION: ARC APG members

Confidential Discussion (for HEI representatives only)

17.25 TEF

Discussed:

- UCAS has developed it well as applicants can't search on it
- Not everyone in it, institutional badge but not course badge.
- Subject TEF will be high level and not that detailed
- Noted lots of consultation by UCAS over this - viewed as welcome approach by UCAS

17.26 Change Steering Group

Discussed:

- CSG has been suspended because of recent actions by UCAS, e.g. Offer Rate Calculator
- Chair of CSG will be asking incoming UCAS CEO what they think
- Great work has been achieved by the Group, e.g. creation of the Clearing Working Group

17.27 Variable Start Dates Working Group

Discussed: initial suggestions from the Working Group presented to UCAS UAG

Noted:

- Concern about the dates: tighter and shorter needed
- It is completely different
- Secretary of ARC APG will share the paper and invite comments to Andy Frampton

ACTION: Secretary to ARC APG

17.28 UCAS Groups

Received: written updates from UCAS Groups (APG/17/16)

Discussed:

- Concern raised about a lack of cross membership joining up the Groups e.g. admissions discussion in International Advisory Group
- Noted that UAG - SEAG sharing is now in place

17.29 Any Other Business

Discussed:

- Apprenticeships
    - Request for anyone with good practice to share at a future ARC APG meeting. Any volunteers should contact the Secretary of ARC APG.
      ACTION: ARC APG members
    - Suggestion - approach both employer and an HEI
    - Noted that much more information required than for direct applicants
    - Noted that fee status assessment is more flexible than that followed by HEIs
    - Question raised as to whether tariff points on entry are reportable through HESA because generally lower?
- Question: Did any HEIs have any advice on how to manage applicants on social media posting inappropriate comment?
    - No answers from members

17.30 Dates of Future Meetings

Future meetings are scheduled take place on:

- Friday 24 November 2017: Woburn House, London
- Friday 9 February 2018: Woburn House, London
- Friday 15 June 2018: Woburn House, London