

Delivery Partnership Steering Group

Progress Report No 3 – March 2007

Delivery Partnership: Improving the higher education applications process

Purpose

1. This report provides information on the meeting of the Delivery Partnership Steering Group (DPSG) held on 27 February 2007. The Report also includes the following attachments:

Appendix 1: Updated DPSG Action Plan

Appendix 2: Implementation Timeline

Appendix 3 Frequently Asked Questions Sheet.

Continued political interest

2. The Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, Bill Rammell MP attended the DPSG meeting on 27th February 2007. The Minister emphasised the Government's commitment to the Delivery Partnership process and acknowledged DPSG's work in taking the recommendations forward.

Background and context

3. During the last decade, there have been a number of reviews of the higher education (HE) admissions system, including three HE sector-led reviews and 2 DfES-led investigations. In September 2004 Charles Clarke, then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, set up a review group under the chairmanship of Sir Alan Wilson, then Director General of Higher Education, to consider changes to the current applications system. This covered the provision of information, advice and guidance to students; information about applicants; and plans for reforming application processes for 2008 and beyond. These proposals were published as a consultation paper, (*Improving the Higher Education Applications Process: September 2005*).
4. A copy of the Government response to these proposals is available on the DfES consultation website at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/conResults.cfm?consultationId=1346>. Although the initial consultation was DfES-led, the Government response was supported and endorsed by Ministers in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In summary, the Government response recommended a step-change to reform as follows:
 - Changes to the current applications system for implementation by 2008/09 [summary of changes attached in Action Plan, **Appendix 1**]
 - A review in 2010/11 with a view to considering further the implementation of PQA from 2012.

- The establishment of a UK-wide Higher Education sector-led Delivery Partnership.

Establishment of the Delivery Partnership

5. The Delivery Partnership coordinates the programme of reform. The Partnership, chaired by Sir Graeme Davies, Vice-Chancellor, The University of London, embraces a wide range of education stakeholders including schools, FE and HE institutions and awarding bodies, and offers strategic leadership and guidance to the project as a whole, liaising with relevant organisations where necessary. Further details on the Delivery Partnership are available in Progress Report No 1 on the UUK website (details at the end of the Report).

Action Plan

6. **Appendix 1** identifies the main actions that are required of the Delivery Partnership for each recommendation as described in the Government response; the Action Plan was agreed by the Group at its first meeting on 3 October 2006.

Implementation Timeline

7. **Appendix 2** is an **Implementation Timeline** that translates the Action Plan into a timeline of activities for stakeholders including HEIs, schools and colleges, UCAS and awarding bodies. Information is given on the timing of developments and actions required. A separate timeline has been produced for each year. In view of the importance of communications in this process a separate communications line is included which will incorporate all communication milestones, dates of Stakeholder Standing Conferences, and publication of DPSG Progress Reports etc. The Plan is also available on the UUK and GuildHE websites.

Reports from the Working Groups

8. Each Working Group reported on developments:

Entry Profiles Working Group (Chair: Janet Graham, Director, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions)

This Working Group has been tasked with encouraging the development of Entry Profiles (EPs). The Group met on 5 February 2007 and identified a number of key tasks:

- (a) establish evidence of what users (prospective students, advisers etc) think of EPs
- (b) establish evidence of what HEIs think of EPs
- (c) with UCAS, review how profiles appear on UCAS website and related UCAS IT systems and processes
- (d) consider any other issues and developments that will/may impact EPs
- (e) with UCAS, devise mechanisms to encourage more HEIs to develop EPs
- (f) with UCAS, devise and implement a communications plan to disseminate information to users and to HEIs on EPs to raise awareness and use/development.

Art and Design Working Group (Chair, Professor David Vaughan, Principal, Cumbria Institute of the Arts)

The Working Group met on 21 February 2007 and had had a wide-ranging discussion of issues relating to the implementation of Recommendation 16, which proposes replacing the current two-route application process for Art and Design with a single sequential applications process. The challenging timeline for delivery had been recognised in that proposals would need to be developed, consulted upon, and finalised by November 2007 with details agreed at the DPSG meeting in June.

Adjustment and Timings Group (Chair, Professor Steve Smith, University of Exeter)

This Group is leading on a number of recommendations, including the development of a process whereby students will have the facility to make fresh applications if they achieve higher grades than predicted (*Recommendation 14*) and to include a new confirmation and application round to be run ahead of clearing (*Recommendation 15*). This required consideration of the 'gathered field' concept and the timing of level 3 qualifications. Given the broad nature of these recommendations, the Group held a round table discussion on all the recommendations and concluded that there was probably no one answer for how these recommendations could be implemented. In view of this, the Group agreed to devise three or four different models for the Working Group to consider at their next meeting on 17th April 2007. A paper with final recommendations would be submitted to the DPSG meeting in June.

Gathered field

9. The Government, in its response to recommendations to improve the current HE applications, reported that the introduction of the concept of a gathered field would bring benefits to those applicants who preferred to wait until later in the application period to apply. The DPSG convened a small sub-group to consider how this concept could be introduced, taking account of the key objectives which a gathered field system would need to meet and the risks associated with the introduction of such a scheme. In discussion several issues were raised including the agreement to exclude international applicants from the gathered field. The DPSG acknowledged that it would be vital for the development of a solution to be as widely owned as possible. In light of this the Group agreed to circulate a consultation paper on this issue. This can be obtained from your representative on the DPSG or the Secretariat (for details see paragraph 18). **Closing date for responses is Monday 23 April 2007.**

Earlier release of level 3 results

10. Earlier release of Level 3 results, notably A Levels, has been identified as a potential contributor to the creation of a sufficient time interval for a post-qualification application round for higher education. In view of this the DPSG looked at issues around the timings such as bringing forward the end-point of the examinations timetable and changing the distribution of GCE examinations within the current period by making greater use of the first week, or having fewer separate examinations to schedule (following revised GCE specifications to be implemented in September 2008). The Adjustment and Timings Group has been asked to look into further options.

Applicant attitude survey

11. The DPSG agreed that the outcomes of an applicant attitude survey would be useful as a benchmark to assess the impact of the changes to the applications process.

Communications strategy

12. *The Progress Report*

The Progress Report represents the official communiqué from the Delivery Partnership and includes an Appendix with an Action Plan which is updated after each meeting to reflect subsequent progress and developments.

13. *Delivery Partnership Website*

Information and updates on the work of the Delivery Partnership can be found at the web address:
<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/activities/admissions.asp>

14. *Frequently Asked Questions*

A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) is attached as **Appendix 3** and is available on the Universities UK website. **Colleagues are asked to distribute this widely amongst admissions colleagues within their institutions.**

15. *Stakeholder conferences*

A stakeholder conference has been agreed, the first will be held on **10 May 2007 at the Regent's College in central London**. Further details will be sent to all stakeholders shortly.

16. *Further dissemination of information about the work of the Delivery Partnership*

It was confirmed that key members of the Delivery Partnership Steering Group would be keen to accept invitations to attend conferences or meetings in order to further disseminate information.

17. *Future opportunities to speak*

The Secretariat would also welcome information on any opportunities for members of the DPSG to speak on the work of the Delivery Partnership.

Feedback and further information

18. Enquiries regarding the work of the Delivery Partnership or feedback on planned or future activities should be directed to:

- Your organisation representative; or
- The DPSG Secretariat: Hazel Flynn, GuildHE (hazel.flynn@guildhe.ac.uk).
Fiona Waye, Universities UK (Fiona.waye@universitiesUK.ac.uk).

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