

## Progress Report No 4 – June 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 1 May 2007. Appendix 1 provides a summary of the actions taken to date.

#### Background information

2. Background information on the work of the DPSG and the progress of its action plan, can be found at website address:  
<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/activities/admissions.asp>

#### Reports from the working groups

3. Each working group reported on its progress:

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

The Entry Profiles Working Group has carried out some research with users of Entry Profiles (EPs) (HEIs, Year 13 students) on their use of EPs and this is being extended to a wider survey of current applicants students and also first year undergraduate students. The research is intended to establish the use and usefulness of EPs during the application process and hence to determine their benefits to HEIs and users of EPs, whether potential universities in the UK or overseas.

The UCAS Entry Profile information officers are contacting institutions which have not completed their entry profile coverage, and will help those who have not yet begun to develop EPs. There are changes to the Entry Profile database which will make the process of compiling EPs easier for HEIs. Information on EPs will be included in the next 'UCAS News' which goes to all schools, colleges, HEIs and other on the UCAS mailing list.

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

The Art and Design Working Group held its second meeting on 24 April 2007. The Group focussed its discussion and agreement on the features required of a revised admissions process to achieve recommendation 16, and the range of data provide by UCAS.

The group agreed that a consultation paper should be circulated to all stakeholders for consideration (see paragraph 11). Subject to the outcome of the consultation process, the potential remained for the September

2009 intake to be the first to use the revised admissions procedures. The aim is to finalise proposals by November 2007 in order to facilitate this.

***Timings and Adjustment Working Group*** (Chair, Professor Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor, University of Exeter):

The Timings and Adjustments Working Group met on 17 April, where members considered early drafts of alternative proposals to meet the requirements of Recommendations 14 and 15, which would allow those students who had exceeded the terms of their conditional firm offer to seek a place elsewhere. Each model was considered in terms of principles, process and implications for each of the stakeholder groups.

It was agreed that there would be opportunities for informal discussions with stakeholders about the merits and manageability of the proposals, and that a full consultation would take place following the 25 May meeting of the Working Group. The aim was to reach agreement on the model to be taken forward at the next meeting of the DPSG on 28 June, so that UCAS can begin work on its implementation for Autumn 2009 entry. Details of the consultation are available in paragraph 11.

#### **Feedback to applicants**

4. Following a JISC supported research project carried out by UCAS, SPA (Supporting Professionalism in Admissions programme), and APS Ltd, a statement of good practice in providing feedback to applicants has been drafted by SPA. It was agreed that this would be circulated as a consultation by the Delivery Partnership (see paragraph 11). Further discussion of this topic will be included in a workshop at the first SPA conference on 21 June 2007 on Professional Admissions: Sharing Good Practice, at the Inmarsat Conference Centre, 99 City Road, London, EC1Y 1AX. Further details are available from SPA (enquiries@spa.ac.uk).
5. The final statement will be disseminated to all HEIs and stakeholder groups by SPA and DPSG, with the definitive statement held on the SPA website.

#### **Gathered field consultation**

6. The DPSG received the outcomes of the Gathered Field consultation, which had received a wide response from across the UK and the education sector. The consultation asked for views on the introduction of a gathered field for the initial decision making on applicants and focussed on different methods and dates that might be implemented. Overall the notion of the gathered field did not gain unreserved support. There was widespread comment from respondents, particularly those from higher education that there was not sufficient clarity over what problem the 'gathered field' proposals were trying to solve. The higher education sector was sympathetic to the idea that a gathered field might improve perceptions of fairness but many respondents were clearly concerned about the principles of what was being asked. There was concern amongst HEIs that the current UCAS principle of 'fair and equal consideration' until the UCAS closing dates, was misunderstood by some schools and colleges. Out of 87 HEI responses, only 9 (10%) were supportive of the proposals, and 62% against. The response from the school sector was different, with 77 respondents (38%) supportive and 72 (35%) against. The comments from all respondents were wide ranging and the DPSG were particularly

concerned by comments about the psychological impact on applicants of receiving all their decisions on a given date made by both sides and on securing the other enhancements such as feedback and transparency that might make the gathered unnecessary.

After considerable discussion the DPSG agreed that, as it was not currently possible to assess the impact of the other changes that the DP was seeking to make, it was not the right time to proceed with devising mechanisms to implement a gathered field as outlined in the government response to the Wilson report. It was felt that the proposals for enhancing feedback to applicants, together with the increasing number of clear and transparent Entry Profiles developed by HEIs for applicants on UCAS Course Search, should solve a large part of the problem about demonstrating fairness. In light of this, the Group agreed that the question would be revisited some time in the future, possibly during the final review of the impact of the reforms in 2010.

## **Communications strategy**

### *7. Stakeholder conference*

A stakeholder conference was held on 10 May. Around 150 delegates attended, many from higher education, but also with representatives of schools, colleges and advisory services.

The conference provided an opportunity for the stakeholders to comment on, and contribute to the work of the DPSG, and in particular its' working groups. It was also an opportunity for stakeholders to voice their opinions on the various reforms taking place, and to engage with the detail of it. The main message from the delegates to the DPSG was to ensure that the reforms and changes made were proportionate to the problems they were trying to solve, and that they did not introduce more problems for students from particular groups as a consequence.

The chair of the DPSG Professor Sir Graeme Davies, expressed his thanks for the enthusiastic participation of the delegates, and for the constructive contributions made.

### *8. Future opportunities to speak*

Members of the DPSG, and particularly the Chair, Professor Sir Graeme Davies has been very pleased to speak at a number of conferences recently about the work of the Delivery Partnership Steering Group and will shortly be speaking at the SPA conference in London on 21 June and at the AoC and SFCF 16-19 Summer Conference 2007 in Cambridge. The Secretariat would welcome information on any future opportunities for members of the DPSG to speak on the work of the Delivery Partnership.

### *9. 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>

## Delivery Partnership Consultations

10. The Delivery Partnership is keen to obtain feedback on the implementation of a number of the recommendations. Although the Group has been tasked with extremely tight deadlines, a number of consultations have been published recently to ensure all stakeholders have an opportunity to comment on how some of the proposals would be implemented. The consultations were distributed on 29 May to all higher education institutions universities by Universities UK and GuildHE and to other education stakeholders via the UCAS mailing list and the organisational representatives on the Delivery Partnership.
11. The consultations are as follows:
  - Consultation 1:** A draft statement of good practice on feedback to applicants who have been unsuccessful in gaining a place at an HEI
  - Consultation 2:** Revision of the admissions process for entry to Art & Design courses.
  - Consultation 3:** Models to implement an adjustment period to enable students who achieve higher grades than those required by their conditional offers to make a new application in August.
12. Feedback from these consultations will inform decisions made by the DPSG at their next meeting on 28 June 2007. The outcomes of these discussions will be circulated in Progress Report No 5.
13. The DPSG is extremely grateful to all those who have responded to the consultations, particularly given the short timescale. Although tasked with delivery, the Delivery Partnership places great importance in engaging with all stakeholders before changes are implemented to ensure that the proposed changes are workable.

## Next steps and further information

14. The DPSG has commissioned a paper to look into the interdependencies of the different Delivery Partnership Strands. This will be essential in ensuring that the impact of the reforms do not conflict with each other, and do not have implications for applicant or institutional behaviour that might not be in the spirit of the intended reforms.
15. 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: Alice.Hynes, Guild HE ([alice.hynes@GuildHE.ac.uk](mailto:alice.hynes@GuildHE.ac.uk))  
Fiona Waye, Universities UK ([fiona.waye@universitiesUK.ac.uk](mailto:fiona.waye@universitiesUK.ac.uk))

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