

Progress Report No 8 – Delivery Partnership: Improving the higher education applications process

Purpose

This report provides an update on developments following the Delivery Partnership Steering Group meeting in October 2008. Specific reference is made to the following recommendations /issues:

- (1) Entry Profiles;
- (2) Unistats;
- (3) Simplification of the art and design process;
- (4) Implementation of an adjustment period;
- (5) Provision of feedback to applicants;
- (6) Information, advice and guidance.

Stakeholders' conference, 21 November 2008

A conference outlining all the changes for phase 1 and plans for the next phase of activity will be outlined and discussed at a Delivery Partnership Stakeholders' Conference on 21 November 2008 at Woburn House. The Conference Agenda, Booking Form and event updates are available from the UUK events website at <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Events/Pages/Standing-Stakeholder-Conference-on-the-Delivery-Partnership.aspx> .

Background

The Delivery Partnership has been tasked with implementing a number of changes to the current higher education applications process. These changes form part of a phased approach to reform of the applications process following the recommendations from Government to the outcomes of the former DfES-led consultation *Improving the Higher Education Applications Process*, (September 2005).

The Government response was supported and endorsed by Ministers in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and recommended:

- i. Implementing a number of changes to the current system.
- ii. An impact assessment of the reforms in 2010/11 with a view to considering further the implementation of a Post Qualification Application (PQA) process (i.e. no offers until after results are published) from 2012.

A copy of the full Government response can be downloaded at:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/conResults.cfm?consultationId=1346>.)

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/AboutUs/AssociatedOrganisations/Partnerships/Pages/AdmissionsDeliveryPartnership.aspx>).

Update on progress

Entry Profiles (EPs) (Recommendation 1)

More information is now available for applicants to help them in making more informed decisions through the use of Entry Profiles. For 2009 entry profiles exist for 82% of all courses on the UCAS website. Entry Profiles are intended to give potential applicants specific information about the course, formal entry requirements and about the qualities and experiences higher education institutions (HEIs) are looking for in their applicants. The Entry Profiles are helping to ensure that every applicant has access to information about the full range of HE opportunities and can therefore apply to a course and institution which best meets their needs. The HE sector is working towards 100% of courses having Entry Profiles by September 2009.

Unistats – www.unistats.com (Recommendation 3)

The Unistats website (formerly the Teaching Quality and Information site) was launched by UCAS on the 26 November 2007. The website is designed to provide prospective students with a wealth of information such as tariff scores, staying on rates, and graduate destinations. This information will help applicants make decisions about entry to higher education along with the UCAS Course Search and Entry Profiles. Although the use of Unistats was slow initially, this has begun to change as a result of awareness raising activities by UCAS. Since the launch in 2007 there have been over 557,000 visits and from September 2008 this has increased to 2,500 hits per day.

Feedback: Statement of Good Practice (Recommendation 4)

This recommendation requested that higher education institutions (HEIs) enhance feedback to unsuccessful applicants. Following a consultation in summer 2007, the DPSG - working with the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) Programme, produced a statement of good practice on feedback to applicants who have been unsuccessful in gaining a place at an HEI. The statement was based on policies and practices already provided by many HEIs, and highlighted that feedback should be given when requested by applicants. The statement has been circulated by SPA to all HEIs. All HEIs have been invited to review their policies and procedures about providing feedback to applicants in light of this guidance with a view to implementing any changes to their policies and procedures by December 2008. SPA staff would be pleased to discuss this with the staff in HEIs responsible for drawing up and disseminating their institution's policy and procedure in this area.

Work has taken place on the provision of electronic feedback on-line to UCAS from HEIs which can include the generation of text from codes and an area for free text. Applicants will be able to view feedback provided through Track or on their decision letter. This will be in place for 2009 entry in both the UCAS and the GTRR schemes. The DPSG, working with SPA and UCAS, will monitor the development of policies on feedback and how the electronic feedback options are being used.

Facility to make fresh applications if an applicant has achieved higher grades than required by their conditional offer by 2009 entry (known as the 'adjustment period') (Recommendation 14)

The DPSG has been tasked with devising a process for applicants to be able to make a fresh application if they exceed their conditional firm offer. This is one of the key recommendations of the reform process and has been led by Professor Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor, University of Exeter. From August 2009, applicants who have achieved better results than required by the offer they have accepted will, for a short time (5 days), be able to look for an alternative course that has places available whilst still holding their original choice. UCAS expects to release details of the process in early autumn.

UCAS has set up an internal group to take forward the technical changes. In addition, UCAS has established a Working Group with 10 HEIs to consider how the adjustment period will work in practice. Information on the outcomes from the Group will be circulated by UCAS to all stakeholders.

Simplifying the applications process for art and design (Recommendation 16)

Progress Report No 7 outlined the main changes arising as a result from a consultation on the options for simplifying the art and design applications process. The key decision being that Route B would be set aside and new facilities would be made available for all institutions and applicants in relation to interviewing and the consideration of material evidence as part of admissions decision-making. These changes were agreed by the UCAS Board in June recognising the significant consensus arising from the consultation in spring and work is now proceeding at UCAS to put this in place for the admissions cycle operating from September 2009, for 2010 entry.

However, the consultation also revealed that there was a divergence of views in relation to the deadline dates for submission of applications. At the October meeting the DPSG considered advice from a Scoping Group set up by the DPSG to look specifically into this issue and recognised that there was a strong likelihood that further consultation was unlikely to arrive at a consensus because the debate on dates conflated several different issues – specific art and design practices, information advice and guidance more generally, the equal consideration principle and multiple application dates.

In view of this, DPSG and UCAS have agreed that all institutions previously offering courses under Route B will need to confirm that they wish to accept applications by a deadline date for equal consideration of **either 15 January OR 24 March** for applicants applying for admission in 2009 for entry in 2010. In the New Year institutions will be invited by UCAS to submit their choice of date for their courses on an individual basis using the Weblink Net Update facility.

Prospective applicants will be able to see the deadline date for the different courses they are applying and could, if appropriate, indicate when their portfolios would be ready for consideration in their personal statements.

The DPSG will now work with relevant groups/organisations to ensure there is the advice and support necessary for those providers where programmes have recruited significantly through Route B. Specifically, the DPSG will engage with those institutions working on the Foundations Studies course as an entry route to HE given the risks and consequences arising from this decision.

A meeting with Foundation Course Tutors was held on 22 October. At this meeting a number of concerns were raised particularly in terms of the potential impact that the removal of Route B could place art and design foundation courses at risk because applicants on these courses required sufficient time before making their decision on their applications. In view of this the availability of sufficient advice and guidance to such applicants around the deadline application date would be critical.

In addition the DPSG will explore further with UCAS and admissions practitioners, the practicalities with regard to interviewing/face to face consideration, the use of portfolio/other material evidence, in order to enable defined proposals to be developed through the change mechanisms within UCAS.

Information advice and guidance (IAG)

Many of the changes being made to the decision process focus on the type and quality of information that is available to applicants to make their choices. The DPSG has emphasised to Government that it is essential that applicants schools, and parents are not only aware of the current changes to 14-19 education in England and the reforms of the applications process but that students have access to guidance to help them interpret the information so that they can best match their aspirations, knowledge and skills to the right higher education course.

Those responsible for providing information, advice and guidance to potential applicants will be critical in providing timely, high-quality, information and advice on these changes. DPSG has highlighted the importance of ensuring that applicants are aware of how GCSE and A Level and 14+ choices of qualifications might or might not restrict HE application choices; how the selection process operates including the availability and role of EXTRA, and how fairness and transparency is ensured.

The DPSG will continue to forge links with IAG services, including the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) **Advisory Group for Information, Advice and Guidance for Young People**. This group consists of a number of IAG organisations in schools and colleges to facilitate the provision and access of high quality, impartial information, advice and guidance on learning and careers options.

Further information

The DPSG has a further meeting on 11 December. 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:

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