

Delivery Partnership Steering Group

Progress Report No 1 – November 2006

Delivery Partnership: Improving the higher education applications process

Purpose

1. This report provides information on the purpose, membership and the Action Plan of the newly established Delivery Partnership.

Background and context

2. The recent DfES-led consultation *Improving the Higher Education Applications Process*, DfES, (September 2005) was the latest in a series of reviews of the admissions system which have taken place over the last decade or so. These have included 3 HE sector-led reviews and 2 DfES-led investigations
3. In May 2006, the Government issued its UK-wide response to the latest consultation. It is important to note that although the initial consultation in 2005 was DfES-led, the Government response was supported and endorsed by Ministers in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The response recommended:
 - A number of changes to the current applications system for implementation by 2008/09
 - A further review in 2010/11 to evaluate the impact of the reforms, and in light of the experience of them, and an evaluation of other changes within higher education, to commit to a consideration of further progress towards PQA by 2012. (A copy of the full Government response can be downloaded at:
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/conResults.cfm?consultationId=1346>.)
4. The Government response recommended that the HE sector should establish a Delivery Partnership to lead progress on incremental reforms that would:
 - *make it easier for students to understand the entry requirements of the courses available;*
 - *provide more and better information on which HEIs can base their admissions decisions;*
 - *involve students submitting, and HEIs considering, fewer initial applications, thereby reducing administrative burdens;*
 - *ensure applications are considered on the basis of a gathered field, creating a more equal chance for all students and reducing the temptation for them to place early, ill-researched applications;*
 - *give students better feedback on their applications, allowing them to make better informed decisions about their HE options;*

- *give those who have been unsuccessful in gaining an offer with their initial applications better opportunities to continue applying in search of a place;*
- *result in fewer students needing to enter Clearing; and*
- *offer those students who have achieved higher grades than required by their firm conditional offer the chance to seek an alternative place that best matches their aspirations and circumstances.*

Delivery Structures

5. Given that HEIs are autonomous in admissions matters, Universities UK and Guild HE endorsed the establishment of a UK-wide sector-led Delivery Partnership; although the importance of engaging a broad partnership of interests across schools, colleges, FE and awarding bodies was recognised as critical in terms of ensuring the successful implementation of the reforms.
6. The structures for delivering the reforms are as follows:
 - **A UK-wide Delivery Partnership Steering Group (DPSG)**
This would offer strategic leadership and guidance to the project as a whole, liaising with relevant organisations as necessary. The Group, chaired by Sir Graeme Davies, Vice-Chancellor, University of London, consists of a number of admissions practitioners recognising the focus on delivery (including key admission groups within the HE sector), vice-chancellors, and representatives from UCAS, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions [SPA], AHUA, NUS, FE, schools, 6th form colleges, awarding bodies, DfES, Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly and DELNI, see **Appendix 1** for the complete membership.
 - **An Advisory Board**
This would operate as a ‘virtual group’ and incorporate a much broader-based membership, including practitioners, which could further advise and support the work of the DPSG where appropriate. (Membership to be finalised.)
 - **A Standing Conference of Stakeholders**
This would provide a facility for a wide range of bodies/ organisations interested in developments to come together and comment on the progress/ outcomes of the Delivery Partnership. This would be vital in ensuring that the changes were workable at an operational level from both an applicant and institutional perspective.
 - **Secretariat**
The Secretariat would consist of Universities UK (including Universities Scotland and Higher Education Wales) and Guild HE, and work closely with UCAS and SPA. The Secretariat would be responsible for ensuring that any changes to the applications process are UK-wide and appropriate to each country.

Continued political interest

7. Political interest in admissions remains high. The DfES and each of the Devolved Administrations have asked to be represented on the Steering Group. In addition, the HE Minister Bill Rammell has asked to attend a meeting of the Delivery Partnership Steering Group (DPSG) in February 2007.

Action Plan

8. **Appendix 2** attached identifies the main actions and the time frames that are required of the Delivery Partnership for each recommendation as described in the Government response. These actions were agreed by the Group at the first meeting held on 3 October. In pulling these together the Steering Group agreed that:
 - Although recommendations would generally be tackled on an individual basis it was recognised that it would be important to ensure that a holistic approach was taken overall, acknowledging that decisions on individual recommendations may impact (positively or negatively) on other recommendations.
 - The potential impact of the individual proposals on the recruitment of international students should be taken into account.
9. In terms of actions of particular significance to HEIs and those advising applicants it is important to highlight the adoption of the Government recommendation **to reduce the number of applications from six to five for 2008 entry**. At the meeting UCAS agreed to begin the technical work required to implement this change. The DPSG will monitor the impact of the reduction on applicants.
10. **Appendix 3** provides a Gant Chart with the proposed timing of the recommendations.

Proposal for research into the student perspective regarding the proposed reforms

11. In addition to the actions referred to in paragraph 8, the DPSG agreed that the student perspective would be key to the proposed reforms. In addition, as consumers of the admissions process, the attitudes of students to the admissions process will need to be tested; the outcomes will be important in informing the detail of the operation of the proposals. The DPSG agreed to liaise with UCAS, SPA, NUS and other relevant bodies to discuss possible next steps. This project would depend on external funding.

Engagement with stakeholders

12. All the reforms require input from HEIs and a wide range of different organisations, as such the DPSG recognise that it will be essential that the Group work closely with institutions and the respective organisations, Mission Groups and particularly with the admissions decisions makers.

13. Furthermore, the DPSG agreed that it would be helpful to hold two/three Standing Stakeholder Conferences during 2007/08 to ensure that all interested parties have an opportunity to input to the reform process. The first conference would be held in Spring 2007.

Communications strategy

14. In view of the importance of communicating the progress/ outputs of the Delivery Partnership, the DPSG is currently developing a communications strategy. This includes management of the media coverage as well as communication with other audiences such as eg the HE sector, FE colleges, 6th form colleges, schools and other stakeholders. It is envisaged that those representing the different sectors on the Steering Group will facilitate communication of key messages and outcomes. The Chair will make the first public announcement on progress so far at a conference, supported by UUK, on admissions on 16 November 2006. A presentation will also be made to the Academic Registrars Council on 1 December 2006.

Next steps

15. The DPSG recognises that implementing the proposals by 2008/09 (where feasible) represents a significant commitment for the Delivery Partnership and the need to make rapid progress particularly in 2007. In light of this, the DPSG has agreed to meet every two months, future dates as follows:

2006: 14 December

2007: 27 February, 1 May, 28 June, 2 October, 6 December

2008: 6 February, 22 April, 26 June, 7 October, 11 December.

16. A progress report will be produced summarising the actions after each meeting. Regular reports will also be provided to the UK Board and GuildHE Council, HEW Committee meetings, University Scotland Main Committee meetings and key admissions groups.

Further information

17. Further information on the Delivery Partnership is available from organisation representatives on the Delivery Partnership Steering Group or from the Secretariat:

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