

# Delivery Partnership Steering Group

## Progress Report No 2 – January 2007

### Delivery Partnership: Improving the higher education applications process

#### Purpose

1. This report provides information on the meeting of the Delivery Partnership Steering Group on 14 December 2006, and progress and actions taken to date. The Report also includes the following attachments:

**Appendix 1:** Updated Action Plan

**Appendix 2:** Membership of three newly established Working Groups set up to take forward specific recommendations

#### Working Groups

2. Three small working groups have been set up to implement a number of specific recommendations.

##### **Entry Profiles Working Group**

*Chaired by Janet Graham, Director of Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme.*

This Group will work with UCAS to encourage the provision of clear, comparable entry requirement information, with a view to moving toward 100% provision of information for students wishing to enter HE in 2009. The Group will also consider developments with Entry Profiles relating to vocational pathways and the provision of quality advice and guidance for both adults and young learners.

##### **Timings / Adjustment Period Working Group:**

*Chaired by Professor Steve Smith, Vice Chancellor, University of Exeter.*

This Group will look at a number of interrelated recommendations including how to provide students with the facility to make fresh applications if they achieve higher grades than predicted (Recommendation 14); and the implementation of a new confirmation and application round to be run ahead of clearing (Recommendation 15). Attention will also be drawn to bringing forward the results of AS, A-levels exam dates at least one week earlier and ensuring that the needs of those taking alternative qualifications (i.e. entering via non A- level qualifications) are understood and to investigate the publication of non A-level portfolio qualifications earlier than they are at present. (Recommendations 19 and 20.)

### **Art and Design Working Group:**

*Chaired by Professor David Vaughan, Principal of the Cumbria Institute of Arts.*

This Group will advise the Delivery Partnership on matters relating to applications in the area of Art and Design, particularly in terms of how to implement the proposal to replace the current two-route application process for Art and Design with a single, sequential applications process from September to late March (Recommendation 16).

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3. Each group is chaired by a member of the Delivery Partnership Steering Group. Membership of the groups is drawn from the sector with representation from other education sectors as necessary. Information on the composition and remit of these groups is attached. Those who have not been included as a member of a working group will automatically become a member of the Delivery Partnership Advisory Board.

### **Reduction of number of choices from 6 to 5 from 2008 entry**

4. It was confirmed that UCAS was making the necessary technical adjustments to enable the reduction in the number of choices to 5 from the 2008 entry. The maximum number of applications for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science will remain at 4.

### **Feedback to applicants**

5. A scoping study is underway by UCAS/SPA for JISC on applicant feedback: The study focuses on IT support used for giving feedback in HE. A statement on good practice relating to feedback will be drawn up.

### **Improvement of information to applicants**

6. HEFCE has now set out proposals from their Quality Assurance Framework Review Group on improvements to the information about quality and the Teaching Quality Information website. UCAS is working on the new website, after winning the contract to re-launch the site in July.

### **Implementation timeline**

7. An Implementation Timeline is being produced which will communicate to key stakeholders involved in the admissions process the dates at which key processes will be introduced. The timeline is still in draft format, but will be circulated with Progress Report Number 3, following the meeting on 27 February.

### **Communications strategy**

8. *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>

9. *Frequently asked questions*

A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) is being produced and will be available on the Universities UK website. Colleagues are asked to distribute this widely amongst admissions colleagues within their institutions.

10. *Stakeholder conferences*

Two stakeholder conferences have been agreed, the first will be held on 15 May in central London. Further details will be sent to all stakeholders shortly.

11. *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.

12. **Any requests for presentations, attendance at meetings, or press comment should be made in the first instance to either Fiona Waye or Gareth Morgan.**

**Gathered field**

13. 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 applying. As such the DPSG has been tasked with considering how this concept can be introduced. At the meeting, the group requested that some detailed work is undertaken to ensure that all the associated issues are drawn out and that the final solution is as widely owned as possible. To this effect a small group of members, convened by Angela Milln, has been established.

14. The sub-group will draw heavily on a paper previously prepared by Dan Shaffer at Aston University. The sub-group will identify the key objectives which a gathered field system would need to meet; articulate the main risks associated with the introduction of such a scheme; and explore how a gathered field system might operate. This paper would be submitted to DPSG to consider at the next meeting on 27 February.

**Research project on applicant attitudes**

15. It was agreed that a study of the attitudes of applicants to the applications process would be desirable. Universities UK has agreed to underwrite a scoping study which will be submitted to the DPSG for the February Meeting. It is anticipated that the full survey will take place in April/May and again in September. Funding for a full-scale project would be sought from elsewhere.

**Disabled students**

16. It was noted that the Secretariat would be meeting with Skill in January to ensure that the needs of disabled students are identified and taken into account.

**Continued political interest**

17. The Minister for Higher Education, Bill Rammell, is taking a keen interest in the progress of the Delivery Partnership and would be attending the Steering Group meeting on 27 February.

**Further information**

18. Further information about the work of the Delivery Partnership is available from organisation representatives on the Delivery Partnership Steering Group or from the Secretariat:  
Fiona Waye, Universities UK ([Fiona.waye@universitiesUK.ac.uk](mailto:Fiona.waye@universitiesUK.ac.uk))

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Appendix 1

	<i>Summary of actions on each recommendation</i>	<b>Time scale</b>	<b>Actions</b>
1	<p><b>Entry Profiles</b> UCAS to continue their work to encourage the provision of clear, comparable entry requirement information, with a view to moving toward 100% provision of information for students wishing to enter HE in 2008/09.</p> <p><b>Action</b> The DPSG noted that significant progress on this recommendation had already been made with entry profiles on the UCAS website for approximately 50% of courses already and a further 22% were due to be published during 2007. To support further progress by 2008 the Group agreed to establish a Working Group, in conjunction with UCAS and SPA, to work on recommendations for EP development and provide further support for institutions.</p>	Working Group to be established immediately to support HEIs in moving towards 100% by 2009 entry	Working group established, first meeting February 2007. First meeting held on 5 <sup>th</sup> February 2007
2	<p><b>Financial information</b> In the context of the end-to-end review of student finance delivery in England, further consideration to be given to how to realise the principle of giving students researching their possible HE applications easy access to timely, accurate and reliable information, preferably in one place, about all the financial support they may receive whilst in HE.</p> <p><b>Action</b></p> <p>DPSG to keep in touch with a number of initiatives relating to this proposal under consideration across the UK (and including reference to cross border issues). This includes the different funding arrangements across the UK eg as applicable to Scottish and Welsh domiciled students.</p>	2008 entry cycle for possible sharing of data between UCAS and SLC.	Some financial information already available on UCAS website
3	<p><b>Teaching Quality Information</b> HEFCE to commission early research on how students and their advisers are using the information on the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website, to ensure it is meeting the needs of students and their advisers and to inform its further development from 2006.</p> <p><b>Action</b></p> <p>DPSG to keep watching brief. Final report on the impacts and effectiveness of Teaching Quality Information from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, published November 2006.</p> <p>UCAS to report on developments to DPSG.</p>	<p>Completed research published on HEFCE website November 2006</p> <p>Site hosted by UCAS from summer 2007</p> <p>UCAS to report at meeting on 14 December 2006</p>	<p>HEFCE report published November 2006</p> <p>UCAS currently developing new website for launch in July 2007</p>
4	<p><b>Feedback to applicants</b> HEIs to develop more informative letters to feed back to students, detailing particularly why their applications have been rejected.</p>		A scoping study is currently being

	<p><b>Action</b>  DPSG acknowledged that QAA had revised the Code of Practice on admissions Section 10: Admissions to higher education available on <a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section10/">http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section10/</a></p> <p>Also noted that a small JISC Scoping Study by UCAS had been approved to look into good practice in the provision of feedback to applicants, and in the use of technology to support this.</p> <p>DPSG agreed to commission a paper in partnership with SPA, on the differing views, current practice on provision and possible methods of delivering feedback.</p>	<p>Paper to  DPSG meeting  May 2007</p>	<p>undertaken for JISC, and outcomes will be available to the DPSG for its May meeting</p>
<p>5</p>	<p><b>Removal of predicted grades</b>  Schools and colleges should not supply students' predicted exam results with their HE applications and these should play no part in HE admissions decisions.</p> <h1>Action</h1> <p>Predicted grades to remain for the short term and reviewed after the first year of operation by the new system. Meanwhile, DPSG to keep watching brief on related developments including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UCAS Contextual Data Working Group, which is examining the different types of data that could be collected and used within the admissions process.</li> <li>• The development and use of admissions tests via SPA.</li> <li>• The review of the A-level process and provision and use of unit grades in the admissions process, AS levels and explore links with the 14-19 Curriculum HE Engagement Project Board on qualification change in England.</li> <li>• Keep informed of qualification development in Wales (including the Welsh Bac), Scotland and Northern Ireland.</li> <li>• Note: the UCAS/JCQ Unit Grade Working Group and the UCAS/DfES Curriculum Development Group are advising on HE attitudes to changes to qualifications and certification of qualifications in the context of making informed admissions decisions.</li> </ul> <p>DPSG to note that in Scotland, at least 70% of applicants are pre-qualified and HEIs in Scotland are concerned that change should not disadvantage any group of students.</p> <p>Commission a review following the first year of operation of new process (2010).</p>	<p>Commission review following the first year of operation of the new process 2010</p>	
<p>6</p>	<p><b>Recording achievement</b>  The DPSG to keep in touch with developments in the e-portfolio and investigate its potential role in the HE applications process.</p> <h1>Action</h1> <p>DPSG to monitor developments in the e-portfolio and liaise with the JISC group developing the e-portfolio to ascertain timescales for implementation. Need to monitor for any potential disadvantage that may arise.</p> <p>UCAS is re-developing UCAS Apply to accommodate the addition of an e-portfolio to an</p>	<p>Monitor developments</p>	<p>Report to be provided to DPSG Meeting in May</p>

	applicant's application record.		
7a	<p><b>Initial applications</b> Students to submit initial applications between the beginning of September and the end of March, either together or separately. HEIs should seek to respond to applications as speedily as is practicable.</p> <p><b>Action</b> DPSG notes the Government's recommendation to keep the current deadlines. The DPSG to consider how the 'gathered field' principle would work in practice and any possible single date for the release of offers.</p> <p>Scoping Paper to be prepared by members of Steering Group on options for discussion at the meeting on 14 December 2006.</p> <p>Impact assessments to be carried out on changes to both applicant and institutional behaviour from 2009 or 2010 onwards, whichever represents two years of application rounds.</p>	<p>Paper to December 14 Meeting of DPSG.</p> <p>Further work requested for Meeting of DPSG in February</p>	<p>Scoping paper received at 14 December meeting.</p> <p>Further work to be undertaken on implementing a 'gathered field' by a Sub-Group following discussion widely around the HE sector.</p> <p>The sector has been informed of the change. UCAS currently undertaking necessary technical changes to make effective for the 2008 entry cycle.</p>
7b	<p><b>Reduction from six to five applications</b> Government recommended a reduction from six to five applications, which was adopted by the DPSG. This would be followed by a further level of activity (based on current UCAS EXTRA process) to enable those applicants unsuccessful with their initial applications to continue applying for places (see Proposal 8).</p> <h1>Action</h1> <p>DPSG noted the importance of the agreed reduction from six to five applications for 2008 entry onwards being communicated as widely as possible as it would need to be included in prospectuses, websites, HEIs internal electronic data systems etc and be communicated to potential applicants and their advisers.</p> <p>UCAS to change the number of choices from six to five.</p> <p>DPSG to monitor the impact of the reduction on applicants.</p> <p>In the longer term, DPSG to hold discussions on whether it would be possible to reduce the number of applications to four, which would require consultation with the sector and other stakeholders and an assessment of the impact on applicant behaviour and institutions.</p>	<p><b>Fo</b></p> <p><b>r</b> 2008 entry</p> <p>Monitor following 2010 cycle</p>	

8	<h1>Further applications</h1> <p>Students who receive no offers from their initial applications to be able to submit an unlimited number of additional applications, one at a time, until they secure an offer, up to the end of June.</p> <p><b>Action</b> UCAS EXTRA process already allows unlimited numbers of further applications. DPSG to liaise with UCAS regarding a re-launch of information on UCAS EXTRA.</p>	For 2008 entry	UCAS has agreed to re-launch EXTRA this year, for 2008 entry
9	<p><b>HEIs to publish monthly vacancy lists, from the end of March until the end of Clearing.</b></p> <h1>Government response</h1> <p>Recommend the implementation of this proposal taking into account suggestions for greater frequency of provision of information and to start as soon as reasonably practicable after the deadline of 15 January.</p> <h1>Action</h1> <p>Vacancies available in EXTRA are already available on the UCAS website, although separate listings could be produced if thought necessary. DPSG to liaise with UCAS. Initial work to be started for 2007.</p>	For 2008 entry	
10	<p><b>Pre-qualified home and EU students</b> HEIs to continue their work to ensure against unfair competition for places between pre-qualified and other home and EU students.</p>		
11	<p><b>Overseas non-EU students</b> HEIs to continue to consider applications from pre-qualified overseas non-EU students as they do now and, where appropriate, offer them places on an unconditional basis.</p>		

	<h1>Action</h1> <p>DPSG to consider whether it would be helpful to commission a paper on the possible implications of the reform process for international students in liaison with BUJLA, Guild HE International Network, UUK International Policy Committee, UCAS International Group etc</p>		DPSG to commission paper for June Meeting
12	<p><b>Offers</b> Students to continue to hold up to two offers.</p> <p><b>Government response</b> Recommend applicants continue to hold two offers, but that this could be revisited in light of changes to student behaviour.</p> <p><b>Action</b> No action required immediately. There will need to be an assessment of applicant behaviour over time, and annual consideration of the use and take up of the CI choice. DPSG to find out details of the 8% who take up their insurance offer.</p>		Monitor applicant behaviour following reduction from 6 to 5.
Q4	<p>Should students who hold only one offer following their initial applications be allowed to submit additional applications until they gain a second offer?</p> <p><b>Government response</b> Recommends that this is implemented in order to facilitate choice and accessibility for students</p> <p><b>Action</b> DPSG agreed that in the light of the findings arising from the monitoring of student behaviour detailed above, consideration would be given as to the future use of insurance choices and whether their use should be extended to students applying through UCAS Extra.</p>	Monitor student behaviour from 2009	
13	<p><b>Ranking offers</b> Students holding two offers to continue to rank them as firm and insurance choices.</p> <p><b>Action</b> No action required.</p>		No action required.
14	<p><b>Facility to make fresh applications</b> Students who achieve higher grades than required by their conditional offers to be able to make a new application and have their original firm conditional offer protected whilst they do so.</p>		Working group established, first meeting 2 February 2007.
15	<h1>New application round</h1> <p>A confirmation and new application round to be run ahead of Clearing.</p>	Working Group to present paper on options in June 2007	

	<h1>Action</h1> <p>Working Group to be established to consider this question and the best method of implementation. Working Group to consider Recommendations, 14,15, 18, 19, 20.</p> <p>This recommendation will require a fundamental change to UCAS confirmation and clearing processes, which will require substantial consultation and agreement with HEIs prior to development. This may mean a long-lead time for implementation. Behaviour of applicants and institutions will need to be modelled in order to assess the volume of new applications made in the post-qualification adjustment round, the impact this has on HEIs and changes in the use of insurance choices.</p> <p>Will require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• institutional buy-in.</li> <li>• major communication effort to ensure guidance personnel pre-HE are aware of the changes.</li> <li>• Identification of the dependencies in order for the process to work eg. Differential dates of release of examination results and start dates of HEIs.</li> <li>• Identification of the impacts to be evaluated and what the success factors are.</li> <li>• Extensive testing prior to go-live. (The changes will be highly technology-dependent.)</li> </ul>		
16	<p><b>Simplifying arrangements for Art and Design</b> The two-route application system for Art and Design to be replaced by a single admissions system, which retains sequential applications and an opening date for applications at the beginning of September and a closing date in late March.</p> <p><b>Action</b> A Working Group to be established to consider the development of a single admissions system for Art and Design, within UCAS, in collaboration with the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design.</p>	For 2009 entry	Working Group established, first meeting 20 February 2007
17	<p><b>Reforming Clearing</b> Clearing to operate on the basis of three consecutive application rounds in which students submit one application in each round.</p> <p><b>Action</b> No action (Government noted that this proposal was seen as cumbersome and overly complicated.)</p>		No action required
18	<p><b>Changing the time at which exam results are published</b> The results of AS, A-levels, Highers and Advanced Highers to be published at least one week earlier than at present.</p> <h1>Action</h1> <p>DPSG to meet with awarding bodies, regulators and school workforce unions to progress this point and ascertain timescales. This recommendation will also be considered within the Working Group looking at Recommendations, 14,15, 18, 19, 20.</p> <p>DPSG to note that the results of Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers are published</p>	Scoping Paper by Awarding Bodies for meeting in February 2007	Currently under discussion between DfES, Awarding bodies and QCA.

	one week earlier than A levels so now this will ensure A levels and Highers would be available in the same week.		
19 20	<h1>Entry via non –A level qualifications</h1> <p>Work to be undertaken to look at what might be done to inform those taking non-A level qualifications, whose timetables it is not feasible to bring in line with the HE admissions cycle, of the requirements of that cycle, with the aim of allowing them, where possible and appropriate, to timetable their learning and accreditation accordingly.</p> <p>Work to be started now with the express purpose of ensuring that, by 2008/09, the results of non A-level portfolio based qualifications are published earlier than they are at present.</p> <h2>Action</h2> <p>DPSG to pursue these proposals, via Working Group looking at Recommendations 14,15, 18, 19, 20. To include collaboration with the awarding bodies offering alternative qualifications including vocational qualifications and the new diplomas. Attention was drawn to the need to ensure that the needs of those taking alternative qualifications are understood and safeguarded.</p>	Scoping Paper by Awarding Bodies for meeting in February 2007	DPSG to establish a discussion group with JCQ and UCAS (and QCA) to explore what would be required to establish the inclusion of AS grades on the application form as standard and similarly the inclusion of unit grades for vocational qualifications