**UCAS/HELOA Working Group: Let’s Discuss UCAS Exhibitions!**

**Introduction to the HELOA UCAS Working Group**

The Working Group was put together because UCAS and HELOA have always worked closely together and they wanted to formalise the process. Everyone has a vested interest in UCAS exhibitions and UCAS & HEIs want to make the exhibitions work so that the student visitors get the information they need from them.

The purpose of the group is to give HELOA members the opportunity to discuss topics directly with UCAS. Discussion at Group level happens then the regional rep takes any issues, questions or concerns to the working group. The group meets 3 times a year, one without UCAS present and one at UCAS HQ.

There’s a variety of discussion topics including scanners and data, student numbers & attendance, code of conduct, weather conditions & contingency plans, security and new developments such as sustainability.

**Helen Thorne – Director of External Relations – UCAS**

This session is going to be used to talk about what UCAS does and the development of the new UCAS strategy (to be published in February). It will focus on how UCAS supports students to make informed choices via online resources and exhibitions and feedback from students and teachers. There will be 5 discussion topics for the group to feedback on.

UCAS is an independent charity connection people to HE. Helping students make informed choices is their focus. A lot of their focus is on students leaving secondary school and it aims to give information on all options; apprenticeships, work and HE. There is also a focus on PGR and Postgrad options and conservatories. UCAS has a commitment to transparency and openness – 3 million points of info each year to inform HEIs and contribute to public debate. UCAS is funded through student application fees, UCAS media and fees paid by HEIs.

The world of HE is very different to even 5 years ago and will probably dramatically change over the next 5 years again. Brexit will change dynamics if international recruitment and UCAS will have a role to play. We currently have the lowest number of 18 year olds in domestic population and challenges around finance and pensions at universities. Students have an overwhelming choice when leaving secondary school and the amount of info is also overwhelming – need to work with teachers to ensure they’re giving correct information to their students.

UUK review do UG admissions and OfS launching review of UG admission & application. 5 years ago UCAS had lots of competition in HE, now even more so in all the areas they offer IAG in.

**New Strategy: Discover Your Future**

This has been done by talking to UCAS staff, students, teachers and university colleagues.

UG service has to remain at the heart of UCAS. They also have to support UK HE and reflect the diversity in the sector and the diversity in the process.

1. UCAS need to provide services to reach, recruit & retain students
2. Personalisation is key for students using UCAS’ services
3. Want to expand information and advice they give – apprenticeships and L4 and L5 qualifications

Digital channels provide information. Student Hub is an online portal students can sign up to in order to explore HE and apprenticeship options, a step-wise decision making process which is a more personalised experience.

Clearing Plus – will be told more information in UCAS session on Friday at conference. This will be launching this summer to give a better Clearing experience.

UCAS exhibitions provide the face-to-face support for students making their decisions.

These get a high level of satisfaction from students & teachers but exhibitor feedback is lower than UCAS wants. We need to work together to get up to 90% satisfaction. However, 91% of exhibitors say exhibitions are useful to reaching students.

Students want more information in the apprentice zone and they want the events to be hands-on and engaging. Teachers want the breadth of content and UCAS looking at the information they can give teachers at exhibitions.

**Future Plans**

UCAS want to create a reliable event registration & scanning system. They want this to be able to integrate this with other systems and join up with other institutional data.

They will be expanding their apprenticeship and employer offer and expand the programme of talks at events to include information on this.

UCAS will be looking at the viability of events – do some campus events need to be moved to commercial venues?

They plan to reduce subscription costs and make London, Manchester and Birmingham as pay-per event and offer premium stands at these for another cost.

They will be looking into the viability of virtual event software – this could help universities meet more people in hard to reach areas. It can also be used to meet international students.

UCAS will again be considering weekend and evening opening to events. Not for all events, but need to see if there is feasibility to do this in a small number of events. Feedback is that enough is not being done for adult learners and it’s also an opportunity to engage parents.

Events to be more hands on and more participation-based.

Questions

* Unibuddy

If students sign up through UCAS and want to talk to university X then they will be signposted to that university if they are signed up. If want to study subject X then they will be signposted to any university ambassador on that subject.

* Virtual events do not take the place of face-to-face content.

They would be an expansion of offer, not a replacement.

* Location of South West events – events are too close together which is logistically challenging and puts a strain on smaller teams and on wellbeing of staff. Overlapping of events can also put strain on team.

UCAS agree – the events are just as tough on UCAS team. Ultimately it would be ideal to have gaps but are limited to when they can have access to the venue. The best is done while taking into account school holidays. For exhibitors travelling a long distance it avoids the need to travel up and down the country. When there are breaks in near-by exhibitions they are usually filled up with additional school events.

A day break is better for team morale and mental health.

In gaps there are competitor events which can be attended.

As HELOA can we do more in supporting each other in the extremely busy time?

* Evening and weekend events – have any dates been looked at to give people time to travel to events? Will it replace or extend events?

Today’s discussion from the group will be used to inform UCAS on this. It would probably be a change in the way a couple of days are delivered.

Evening event in Manchester – good for local institutions but not so much for further away universities.

**A better experience**

* Length of time in exhibitions is constrained to encourage involvement in whole exhibition (talks, tours, etc.)
* What we offer before they arrive – expectation management, what the event actually is and when they can get out of it. What the floor plan is. Translating it across different mediums and giving to students and advisers
* Split room events – can be confusing – putting a big provider in smaller room to drive traffic and have 2 arrival areas to channel traffic into both rooms. Can be logistically challenging for local organisers and venue restrictions. Try to split students after they have entered. Have to keep some areas open to the public.
* Concerns around interactivity – smaller providers not having the budget and how will that affect fairness? Should UCAS have an interactive stand so not put the onus onto universities? We have to recruit for all subjects so don’t want to bias against some subjects and we are not specialists; we have to give information about all courses not just ones that lend themselves to interactive elements. Students having too much fun – the event is meant to be about finding information, not necessarily doing fun activities for the sake of them. If something is enjoyable but not based their subject of interest is it effective?
* For campus events would interactivity become too much like an open day? Use the Beds event as an example – they have an interactive marquee but cannot collect student data within it. Those on the demo stands are usually academics.
* Smaller budgets & teams to do the interactive events would cost more even to send an academic and would they get penalised because they can’t provide the activity? Academic departments won’t cover the costs so falls on recruitment teams.
* Interactive events – would that be a better option than students sitting and not engaging? Can we do some research into why the students are disengaged? And how we can challenge this?
* Can we engage with other groups (NCOPs) to provide awareness-raising?
* Beds event set-up is a good model for other events to follow

**Virtual events**

* Who would it be targeted to – UK or International? How do you get the engagement from students when teachers aren’t driving them to do it?
* One challenge is the specificity of the questions they receive – means sharing personal details in order to get them answered. How would this be resourced in a larger event?

**Evening/weekend opening**

* Understand what the drive is behind this? The idea behind UCAS events is to reach school groups who are 8-5, Monday – Friday
	+ UCAS have had a fair challenge from NUS and advisory group to say they don’t support mature and adult learners so need to look at how we can do something for that group.
	+ Would Saturday events be applicable to that group as mature students tend to go directly to an institution rather than shopping around
	+ Some competitors do this and do it successfully so have to look at it from the perspective of a challenging marketplace
* From competitors - Friday evening events are good and the Saturday events are not so good and don’t have target audience attending
	+ Some disagreement, depends on which event you go to, some are extremely well attended on a Saturday to have productive conversations with parents. Parents may be more inclined to go to an event on a Saturday rather than an evening.
* Research needed to see if parents are available for these events
* Adult learners as target areas for WP teams – can they be involved more in UCAS events targeted towards this group?
* Depends on who we want to interact with – adult learners tend to stay local. Do all exhibitors have to stay on for evening sessions? Won’t be worthwhile for universities based further away from the event to stay later
* These events should be optional rather than compulsory – would need a different subscription model.
	+ Could create a segregation of events in HEIs who can afford to send additional staff for evening/weekend events

**Competitors**

* Who are the competitors?
* What do they do better than UCAS?
	+ Pay for travel for schools – e.g. UK University Search
	+ Go to places where UCAS doesn’t – e.g. football stadia
	+ App and data capture models are better
	+ Stand space is an issue at UCAS
	+ Inviting Year 11s to events as they are becoming more informed – especially before they pick post-16 options
* Apprenticeships – more competitions for HEIs from them. If UCAS allows more space there needs to be some balance as it will impact on student recruitment

**Pricing**

* Depends on what happens with subscriptions and what the costs are
* Lots of institutions pay for the highest subscription but don’t go to all of them due to cost of travel and hotels.
	+ Events proportionally based on student numbers
	+ Sliding scale?
* Discounted subscriptions for hosting institutions?
* More transparency around subscription packages
* Paying per pitch – pay more for location of stands – can be scaled up and down depending on event
* Additional benefits – if you pay subscriptions can UCAS provide the graphic panels like National School & College Leavers show? Especially if more shell scheme events are going to happen
* EU fairs – accommodation often part of price, can this be used as an option?