**ARC Practitioner Group Updates**   
April 2023

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| **Admissions**  Julie Kelly | The Admissions group met virtually early March and discussed the fact that applications to UCAS were 3% down, despite the demographic upswing, and that this decline was not being felt uniformly across the sector.  It was felt that this was a post-covid “recalibration” and that applications would continue to rise, in fact UCAS were about to start publishing a series of papers on the “journey to a million” applicants, which is now starting to be released, <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/the-journey-to-a-million-applicants-to-he-starts-today/>.    UCAS Council also held it’s meeting in March and gathered feedback on the potential changes to the personal statement, which would be a series of short questions rather than the current free format statement.  In other news, I attended the 2nd UCAS Roundtable discussion on International Student recruitment and the sector now awaits proposals from UCAS on how they intend to support the sector.  Finally worth noting that despite the very poor negative press around the Reject By Default “RBD” date falling during exam season last year UCAS have been unable to make any change for the next cycle (citing difficulty in getting consensus) and suspect this has now been moved into the too difficult pile/kicked into the long grass. |
| **Scotland & Northern Ireland**  Steven Logie | The ARC Scotland & Northern Ireland Practitioners Group met at Glasgow Caledonian University on 17 February.. A number of institutions had been reconnected with the network and new members were welcomed. Sector updates were received from the QAA and Universities Scotland and the convenor provided an update re the ARC Executive.    The network discussed standing items including:   * Data Futures preparedness, noting the varying levels of progress and highlighting concerns about supplier readiness. * Examinations & Assessment, including the balance of on-line and on-campus meetings. * Quality Assurance, including the means by which module handbooks are shared. * Graduation, with members reflecting on varies elements of practice. * Timetabling, including levels of engagement and steps being taken to address this. * Student casework, when members discussed their experiences of dealing with extensions and Extenuating Circumstances.     For Hot Topics, members discussed:   * Responses to student poverty challenges, including reflecting in practice working well and less well. * Student retention and the responses to emerging trends. * Procedures for dealing with disruption to Assessment Boards (e.g. through industrial action) * Gender recognition and student records, in light of recent legislation approved by the Scottish Parliament (however blocked by the UK government). It was agreed to set up a workshop / Special Interest Group to discuss records aspects of gender recognition. * A paper from Student Awards Agency Scotland on a proposal for transferring student information/     The group agreed to increase the frequency of network meetings to four per year, with two online and two in-person. |
| **UKVI**  Jo Wright | The UKVI Practitioner Group met on 31st March in Woburn House, London. We had high attendance, as usual, with 100+ institutions represented. We had three speakers from the Home Office in the morning session, covering a Policy Update, an Operational Update and a briefing on the new Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) system.  On Operations: there was a continued focus on the high numbers of dependants travelling to the UK with students; visa applications were being processed within SLA times for all routes; UKVI are expecting a summer surge of c.450k applications. Following consultation and review, a new PCST offering is being formed, comprising a customer service team, an engagement team and an enhanced sponsorship offering. Graduate route has 89,289 completed decisions with a 1% refusal rate.  On Policy: presentation focused on IT transformation and remote delivery policy. On remote delivery, three approaches were being considered:  (i) allowing remote delivery without set time limits provided face to face delivery is “main method” of timetabled learning;  (ii) allowing a specific percentage (example given was 15%) of timetabled learning via remote delivery;  (iii) allow remote delivery only in exceptional circumstances via amendments to existing change of student circumstance policy.  Members were overwhelmingly in support of the first option.  The ETA presentation was very interesting. The new app was being rolled out to all eligible nationalities by end of 2024, providing digital advance permission to travel to the UK for those who do not currently need to obtain a visa. Call to action for members was to raise awareness with students travelling from affected countries. In the (closed) afternoon session, we had an update from UUK. This included results from a UUK/Public First polling of public attitudes towards international students and immigration, including:   * 64% of UK adults believed the UK should host the same or more international students – only 9% felt international students should be discouraged * 62% recognised that international students gave more to the economy than they took out, and * 67% felt that students should come to the UK irrespective of the university they are applying to (i.e. university type or position in rankings didn’t matter – only 18% felt preferential treatment should be given to those applying to ‘elite’ universities).   Data on UK universities’ future plans for international student recruitment were also shared. |
| **Assessments** Joanne Coward | The Assessment Practitioners' Group met in February with over 50 members attending the online event. We welcomed Kathryn Kendon, Secretary/Registrar at York St John University to her first meeting as our newly appointed Deputy Chair. However, due to Kathyrn's promotion, we will be seeking a new Deputy Chair for the coming academic year. We offer her our warmest congratulations on her promotion.  We were delighted that Jules Forrest and Jack Guymer (University of Bournemouth) agreed to showcase the work they are undertaking on mitigation which initiated a lively debate on what is a live topic in many institutions at the moment. Members also shared how their institutions planned to manage and deal with issues arising from industrial action. Finally, we had a demonstration of Chat GPT in action and a discussion of its potential implications for assessment and assessment policy and practice.  The planned one-off session on degree outcomes statements and grade inflation has been delayed and we hope to pick this up at our next meeting in May/June.  In the meantime, the APG mailbase list continues to be very active with discussions on academic misconduct, invigilators, use of emergency regulations, exams, awards and classification amongst others.  The other main topic of discussion was on the OfS B4 condition on the retention of students' assessed work, particularly as it is a cause of concern across the sector. The Chair of the ARC APG will be representing ARC on a newly-established OfS task and Finish group to discuss the issue. Membership also includes representatives from UUK, JISC and AHUA. |
| **Postgraduate** Rachel Birds | The Postgraduate Practitioner Group has not met since our last 'brown bag lunch' on 13 January where we held a discussion around the range of organisational structures supporting postgraduate/doctoral study across the sector.    The next planned event is an online 'brown bag lunch' on Friday 28 April. The theme for the meetings ‘PGR Careers and Employability’. We hope this will be of interest not only to our regular members but also to some of their colleagues in careers or placements-related roles. Therefore, members have been advised to forward to colleagues who might be interested in attending but do not normally receive our invitations.    Preparations are well underway for our next in-person full day event which will be held at the University of Nottingham on Friday 26 May. The theme for the day is PGR systems and it is proving a popular topic. Bookings are currently open and over 50% of the available places have been taken already.    Network members have been engaging via email on topics of interest including the ongoing debate around the pros and cons of online versus in person vivas, and the perennial challenge of right-to-work checks for external examiners.    A JiscMail list has been created and the group is in the process of moving over to this channel to host its future email discussions. The address for the list is [ARC-PGPG@JISCMAIL.AC.UK.](mailto:ARC-PGPG@JISCMAIL.AC.UK) This aligns with the practice of other ARC practitioner groups. |
| **Quality Assurance**  Jacky Mack |  |
| **SROC**  Marian Hilditch |  |
| **Student Casework**  Lysandre de-la-Haye | **Report of the Student Casework Practitioners Group meeting held on 24th February 2023**    The meeting was held in person for the first time in two years and the return to face to face meetings was welcomed, with it suggested that the meeting time be extended to accommodate the discussion which took place after the meeting.  The meeting covered an update from the Investigators Network on their work within HEIs, and the legal update provided by Julian Sladdin from Pinsent Masons which included the current frameworks available for tackling academic misconduct and in particular highlighted the increase in international essay mills and the definitions of commercial activity which provided some loopholes. The issue of students also facing blackmail/intimidation via contract cheating and the rise of AI were also reported.  The session also highlighted legal and regulatory framework available whilst reminding colleagues of the support needed for students in handling these cases.  A regular update was also received from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, which dealt with 2,850 complaints in 2022, with issues relating to services and academic appeals forming the majority of the cases received.  The range of different issues including cost of living crisis, travel, accommodation, welfare and the balance between employment and study were noted and in particular the issues around industrial action and the OIAs approach to both industrial action and group complaints.  A workshop was also provided on data sharing in relation to complaints involving students and in particular what part data protection legislation played in this and finally colleagues from the University of Surrey kindly provided information on their Responding to Sexual Misconduct by Students Toolkit.  The meeting was well attended with more than 30 colleagues attending and the next meeting is scheduled for 16th June 2023. |
| **Subjects Allied to Medicine**  Stephen Wiggins |  |
| **Timetabling**  Clare Gough | **Timetabling Practitioners Group held 30th March 2023 at the**  **University of Loughborough:**  A really stimulating day at Loughborough with around 40 participant  Universities. It started with an opening session from the Chair talking  about the changes to the constitution, the strategic away day and the  context in which the practitioner group is held.    We followed with a number of sessions, some of which were  interactive including mentimeter polls giving data to the sector as a  whole.     1. **Adventures in Time and Space: Timetabling at Creative Arts Universities**   *Leeds Arts University*   1. **Curriculum Redefined – simplifying programme structures to deliver clash-free**   *University of Leeds*   1. **Brave New World? Redesigning Timetabling Policy Post-Pandemic**   *Loughborough University*   1. **Timetabling Timelines**   *University of Hull*   1. **Loughborough Campus Tour**   We also used the run up to breaks to include networking with some icebreaker questions which resulted in understanding which participants timetabled on a similar scale, were going through the same change or political issue. We then also reground on new participants or regional networks. |