

UCAS Ref: CM/BJ

12 July 2019

Ms Voisin
The Coroner's Court
Old Weston Road
Flax Bourton
BS48 1UL

Chief Executive
Clare Marchant

Rosehill
New Barn Lane
Cheltenham
GL 52 3LZ

e [REDACTED]
t +44 (0)1242 544 990

www.ucas.com

Sent by email

Dear Ms Voisin

I'm writing in response to your letter of 2 May 2019, concerning the inquest into the tragic death of Benjamin Murray on 5 May 2018.

In responding, I wanted to set out the actions that UCAS already takes to help young people make well-informed choices about their futures, as well as the future steps that we are taking in response to the issues you and others have raised, to encourage students to share information about their mental health and wellbeing with universities.

UCAS is an independent charity, which delivers public benefit by helping everyone with the potential to benefit from higher education to make well-informed decisions about their futures and gain access to universities and educational establishments, regardless of their background. This includes providing information and advice about a range of post-18 choices which include apprenticeships, volunteering, and taking a gap year, as well as applying for university. Every year, we help around 700,000 students apply for full-time undergraduate courses at nearly 400 UK universities and colleges.

We work with a wide range of organisations such as Student Minds, Unlock, the National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP), and Stand Alone, to offer tailored information and advice to students who are likely to have specific information needs about applying and progressing successfully to higher education. For example, we provide a student-facing information and advice page focusing specifically on the [health and wellbeing support](#) available at university or college, and another that deals with a variety of [issues related to transition](#). Furthermore, to support cohorts of students for whom we are aware that mental health is a particular concern, we signpost them to relevant information, as seen on the UCAS [estranged students hub](#).

When students apply to universities and colleges, they complete an online application. This includes mandatory information needed by higher education providers to decide whether or not to offer the student a place (and on what basis), and also voluntary information which can be used to support contextual admissions, provide specific student support, and is used for equalities monitoring.

UCAS IS THE TRADING NAME OF THE
UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES
ADMISSIONS SERVICE.

REGISTERED IN ENGLAND AND
WALES: 2839815
(LIMITED BY GUARANTEE)
REGISTERED CHARITY IN ENGLAND
AND WALES: 1024741 AND
SCOTLAND: SC038598
REGISTERED OFFICE AS ABOVE

Applicants are encouraged to declare if they have a disability, special need, or mental health concern, so that universities' student support teams are aware and offer additional help. However, we understand from our work that it can be difficult for young people to self-declare this type of personal, sensitive information. To address this, we have worked with organisations such as Student Minds and the University Mental Health Advisers Network (UMHAN) to develop [additional content](#) that reinforces the importance of declaring a mental health concern, explains the benefits of doing so, and clarifies how this information is used by UCAS and the university or college. We will continue to work with such organisations to ensure that our content is up-to-date, and reaches our applicants in a timely and appropriate manner. Later in the application process, when UCAS emails the applicant to confirm their place at university, we include information about mental health and wellbeing to support their transition to the next stage.

To further support young people who declare a mental health condition on the application, we encourage teachers and advisers (with the consent of the student) to use the reference section of the application to advise universities and colleges of any issues, such as physical or mental health. To ensure that advisers themselves are aware of why it is important for their students to declare a mental health condition, we signpost Student Minds' Know Before You Go and Transitions resources on our [adviser-facing pages](#). In addition, we regularly address student wellbeing and mental health at our teacher and adviser, and provider events, working with stakeholders such as AMOSSHE and Student Minds to ensure all involved in the application process are aware of good practice and the most up-to-date information available.

Our data shows that there has been a significant uplift in the number of applicants self-declaring a mental health concern in their UCAS application in recent years. Since 2014, this number has increased from 7,433 to 17,520 (2.5% of total applicants), which may be a response to the greater encouragement given from a wide range of organisations and individuals to open up the conversation about mental health.

However, we understand from our engagement with students and stakeholders, that some students still withhold this information, possibly due to the fear of stigmatisation, as well as an uncertainty about how the information will be used; applicants may not appreciate how this information could help universities and colleges to support them. Consequently, we are undertaking a number of additional activities to respond to these concerns.

As part of a wider programme of business change, we are redeveloping our online application for undergraduate students. This affords us the opportunity to work with organisations such as Student Minds and the UMHAN to redesign how we ask for information about disabilities, special needs, or mental health issues – and the help text that supports this. To understand the most appropriate and effective way in which to redesign this question, we're holding a roundtable discussion on 30 July with representatives from sector bodies and expert organisations, the result of which will be in place in 2020, for the 2021 entry cycle.

Alongside the new application service, we have developed the UCAS Hub – a new online information and advice tool to support students through every step of their decision-making journey, which surfaces the right information at the right time, based on their expressed preferences and interests. The first version of this will go live this autumn. We are exploring how the UCAS Hub could help strengthen the messaging about all aspects of applying and going to university to alleviate anxiety during the application process, as well as regularly signposting the support services and experts who can offer help once they have made the transition.

Additionally, UCAS is a core member of the Department for Education's new taskforce, the Education Transitions Network. We hope that this network will help to create a collaborative and consistent approach to addressing the challenges of student mental health in higher education.

I hope this has clarified how we have been working to support young students as they consider their post-18 options, and explained how we are seeking to improve the connection between applicants and higher education providers in the future. Also, I hope this overview of the work UCAS is undertaking to support those with mental health concerns illustrates our ongoing commitment to this important agenda. We will continue to engage with stakeholders as we seek to improve the experience of students transitioning into higher education and would be happy to work further with you directly on this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clare Marchant', written in a cursive style.

Clare Marchant
Chief Executive