

Mary Curnock-Cook
UCAS Chief Executive
Rosehill
New Barn Lane
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL52 3LZ

09 April 2010

Dear Mary,

I write to draw your attention to the recent SCORE report that investigated the information available to prospective applicants to help choose the right STEM degree course, a copy of which I enclose. The report highlights the sheer volume and complexity of information available to young people considering applying to enter higher education. SCORE believes there is a need to make significant improvements to the current systems and processes and would like to work with UCAS to explore how these urgently needed improvements can be achieved.

As demand for STEM graduates increases the Government and others have invested in a range of initiatives to raise young people's awareness of the opportunities arising through study of STEM subjects. As part of this process it is of course essential that young people have transparent and easily accessible information that allows them to make informed decisions about subject choice at all stages of their education, including higher education. This is why SCORE commissioned the Centre for Education and Industry at the University of Warwick to research the clarity and transparency of information and admission policies for STEM at the higher education level.

The research was undertaken for SCORE, a partnership of science community organisations working together on science education which comprises the Association for Science Education, Institute of Physics, Royal Society, Royal Society of Chemistry, Science Council and Society of Biology.

Key findings of the report include:

- UCAS data listed 14,805 different HEI courses that require STEM qualifications for entry which equates to 4,815 different subject titles available in the UK. The disparity between this and the relatively small number of pre-university subjects suggests that a modernisation of the HESA/UCAS coding of degrees might simplify entry requirement information.
- Multiple sources of information are needed to gain a complete picture and these are often presented in a wide variety of different styles making it harder for students to navigate their way through information.
- The research also identified significant variation in entry requirements between different types of institutions and for different STEM degrees within institutions. This provides another indication of the extensive research young people must undertake to make informed choices.

- The research indicates that mathematics ability is highly valued in STEM degrees and yet this information is rarely strongly indicated in information to applicants.
- The research suggests that there is a need to ensure that admissions decision processes are transparent and consistent. The research found that admissions tutors gave greatest emphasis to predicted or actual grades and the subjects studied by the applicant.

SCORE has agreed a number of recommendations and it would value an opportunity to discuss with you how these might be taken forward.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jane Algan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chief Executive

The Science Council, project lead organisation for SCORE's work on progression routes