

Minutes

CUG/22/M2

Conservatoire User Group

Held on Thursday 20 October 2022 –at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Café meeting room at the Faculty of Dance campus

Chair:	Elly Taylor	Royal College of Music
Present:	Clara Bezanilla Sarah Bowden Lucy Bray Mengzhu Hou Claire Jones Edward Kemp-Luck Luise Moggridge Dean Moody Nicola Peacock Ashleigh Rice Kam Sahota Justine Spence	Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance Leeds Conservatoire Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance Royal Academy of Music Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Royal College of Music Royal Northern College of Music Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Royal Academy of Music
Apologies:	Karen Edmunds Lindsey Mathie	Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
UCAS in attendance:	Clare Cozens Louise Cyprien Kim Eccleston Nick Quinn Janet Warne Victoria Waterson	Lead Product Manager Service Delivery Manager (Admissions) Head of Strategy and Reform Service Delivery Partner Customer Success Director (online) Service Delivery Coordinator
Observing:	Julia Whittaker	Data Collections Support Officer

Action

A2/22/01 Welcome and apologies

The Group was welcomed to the meeting and the apologies were noted. The Group introduced themselves.

A2/22/02 Minutes and action log from previous meeting

The minutes were approved as a correct and accurate reflection of the last meeting.

The open actions from the log were discussed:

CUG227 & CUG228 would be discussed later in the agenda.

CUG220 [closed] – it was noted that there had been no Conservatoire interest expressed for the Courses Restructure piece of work previously, thus the call was brought in front of the Group again. Claire Jones volunteered to participate in the project.

CUG224 [closed] – Janet Warne would be working with UCAS communications and marketing teams to ensure that requests are not coming in last minute. It was requested that each Institution provide a contact for Facebook Live's and webinars to Janet to ease the process.

Group
CUG230

CUG225 – it was noted that UCAS had changed the wording relating to provision and submission of references, though the Group felt that this section was still not clear enough.

CUG226 – the Group provided further insights into the confusion offer holders are experiencing with terms 'awaiting confirmation'. 'Conditional place' was suggested as an alternative holding wording considering the character limits. It was **AGREED** that this would remain open and UCAS would test the wording with applicants.

CUG229 – a resource with hints and tips was in the process of being collated and will be shared with Conservatoires.

The following issues were raised to be investigated by UCAS:

- Incorrect information is showing for Leeds Conservatoire as part of the reference tick box
- Some applicants are seeing 'DVD or Video' on their interface rather than 'Recording' that is inputted into the Course Collection Tool. Screenshots would be shared with Nick Quinn to aid inquiries

NQ
CUG231

A2/22/03 Reform – Progress and Future Developments

Kim Eccleston provided an update on Admissions Reform to the group.

Recent developments include the Widening Participation (WP) questions which have been introduced into the UCAS application for the 2023 cycle. It was noted that the WP questions would not be seen in the Star J file until 2024 and that this information only applies to UK applicants.

Gender Question

For the 2024 cycle, the UCAS application will see Phase 1 of the changes to the gender question. This involves the changing of answers from 'Male' and 'Female' to 'Man', 'Woman', 'Prefer not to say' and 'Identify in other way'. It was noted that UCAS recognised the benefit for inclusion of a question on legal sex, but there were major legal and GDPR challenges. UCAS would be working with the sector to gather evidence to show the value in gathering legal sex data for Providers. If the application were to include a question on legal sex, there would need to be consideration for capturing third legal sex to align with international applicants from countries who recognised a third legal sex.

References

Reference reform had been paused for UC applications with the UG scheme introducing a new format for the 2024 cycle. Previous discussions had not come to a consensus for the UC application and there was a concern that any changes would increase contact from applicants. Following discussions on the proposals for the new Personal Statement, the Group **AGREED** that they would continue with the references in their current format and potentially remove them once the reformed Personal Statement is introduced as the amended questions would

capture any important information usually part of references. It was suggested that there could be a disclaimer that the 'Institution reserves the right to request a reference'.

Personal Statements

UCAS have been surveying applicants on their use of the Personal Statement and working with customer groups to test proposed models, including the current version of the Personal Statement. It was noted that this work has helped to develop some possible question to head sections under a possible 'About You' part of the application, though there is no consensus on the preferred model. It was noted that the Group felt that the proposals were positive and felt more modern, as well as accessible to non-native English speakers. Any developments would not be introduced until 2025 cycle which will allow sufficient time for informing teachers, advisers and students.

The Group provided the following comments:

- There was agreement that the credibility check for UC would be the interviews and auditions
- Any extenuating circumstances sections would be more suited to sit under an 'About You' section rather than as part of the Personal Statement as it currently exists
- Document or mixed media file upload would be a positive development for conservatoires, especially for Providers who have started to do pre-screening as part of their admissions process. There was some concern about the management of access to these files and may be necessary to be selective with staff access
- It would be beneficial to include a free text section for applicants to list any extra activities, such as festivals or concerts, that are not included in the application, under an appropriate heading
- By dividing the Personal Statement into sections, the Providers hoped that this would encourage applicants to input their qualifications into the correct part of the application

KE
CUG232

It was **AGREED** that a plan would be brought forward at the next meeting by UCAS that could be taken away for further discussion with Faculty.

Choices

The number of choices, as well as the Insurance choice, is currently under consideration as part of the conversation on reform of the application. Any initial thoughts on reform of the choices can be emailed to reform@ucas.ac.uk, although it was noted that UCAS Conservatoires used a different process with Guaranteed Conditional/Unconditional offers and the Reserve Pool.

JW/NQ
CUG233

It was noted that the Group thought it would be beneficial for applicants to have updated Video walkthroughs for the UCAS application.

A2/22/04 Operational update on 21 and 22 cycles

A verbal update on the 2021 and 2022 cycles was given by Nick Quinn.

Waiver of assessment fees for disadvantaged applicants process

The aim is to streamline the process and reduce workload for Admissions colleagues. The Group was asked to quantify the contact and work burden to help inform the discussion at UCAS. It was suggested that there should be an automatic email reminder, for example, for applicants who have yet to pay and it was requested that UCAS look into possibility of paying fees in chunks. It was **AGREED** that the screenshots of the payment process would be circulated with the minutes from the meeting.

NQ
CUG234

It was also **AGREED** that discussions would be held with UCAS Finance team about the lead time and try to get more transparent information for applicants. It was also proposed that the Finance team check more frequently for fee waivers at peak times.

NQ
CUG235

Reference process

NQ

It was **AGREED** that Nick would reach out to a subgroup to work on improved guidance that is clear for both native and non-native English speakers.

A2/22/05 Admissions Product Update

The Group were reminded that odbc-link would be decommissioned in December 2023. It was noted that there would be no 2024 cycle data available once the cycle opens in Spring/Summer 2023. For any questions, members were advised to contact Adam Glaudot at UCAS (a.glaudot@ucas.ac.uk).

UCAS link, which would eventually replace all current link products, is under development and the first phase would be the release of an RPA API which will be first rolled out into test environments for UG Providers. The Group were asked to consider whether there was any appetite for the use of this in UC.

It was noted that work would begin early next year on the integration of contextual data alongside the application. With the work beginning, it allows for discussions on alternatives to POLAR, e.g. ACORN or TUNDRA.

Work is underway for 'reasons for delays in confirmation' functionality in web-link and xml-link. This will allow Providers to inform applicants why they have not yet been confirmed, which will hopefully in turn reduce the amount of customer contact. Providers will be given a list of reasons, including an 'Other' option which will give a free text box.

As part of the Gender question changes, once the development is complete, the answers will be given new codes to avoid confusion with the previous one. It was noted that there were to be some small changes in 2023 to the Star J data to align with the HESA mapping, with larger plans under consideration for 2024.

A2/22/07 Any other business and Close

Following updates from advisory and policy group chairs at UCAS Council, a member of Council suggested that UCAS bring together group members with an interest in Widening Access/Participation, as this was a common topic of concern and a cross-cutting discussion could help to drive this forward. UCAS would like to take this forward as a pilot, opening an invitation to all group members. Anyone interested in being part of the discussion are asked to email access@ucas.ac.uk.

The provisional date of the next meeting is Thursday 16 May at UCAS in Cheltenham.