

## Minutes

CUG/23/M1

Conservatoire User Group

Held on Thursday 11 May 2023 –at UCAS, Rosehill, Cheltenham

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Chair:	Elly Taylor	Royal College of Music
Attendees:	Ellie Lee Claire Jones Edward Kemp-Luck Dean Moody Nicola Peacock Mengzhu Hou Ian Warren	Royal Northern College of Music Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance Royal Academy of Music Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Royal College of Music Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance London Academy of Music and Dramatic Ar
Apologies:	Ashleigh Rice Karen Edmunds Sarah Bowden Iestyn Henson Luise Moggridge	Royal Northern College of Music Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Leeds Conservatoire Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama
UCAS Presenting:	Janet Warne Kathryn Mead Ellie Rowley Scott Elliott Adam Glaudot Kim Eccleston Samantha Sheppard Clare Cozens Emma Cole Jenny Garner	Customer Success Director Senior Events Sales Manager Fair Access Programme Lead Service Delivery Partner (Admissions) Service Delivery Manager (Technical) Head of Strategy and Reform Team Lead Product Owner Lead Product Manager Product Owner Product Owner
UCAS in attendance:	Laura Hawkins Kristi East Louise Cyprien	Customer Engagement Coordinator Account Manager (Events) Service Delivery Manager (Admissions)
Observing:	Julia Whittaker Rebecca Nevin	Data Collections Support Officer Customer Manager

**A1/23/01 Welcome and apologies**

The Group was welcomed to the meeting and the apologies were noted. Ian Warren from LAMDA was welcomed as a new member.

**A1/23/02 Minutes and action log from previous meeting**

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

The open actions from the log were discussed:

*CUG226* – The group is optimistic that confusion will be reduced as the cycle progresses after changing ‘awaiting confirmation from your Conservatoire’ to ‘conditional place’.

*CUG227* – This action will remain as in progress. Although the assessment fee waiver process is now on the Conservatoire assessment page on [ucas.com](https://ucas.com), it advises students to contact the individual conservatoires. The group agreed that there needs to be greater clarity and transparency for students needing guidance. Additionally, teachers who are supporting applicants need to be better informed about the possibility for assessment fee waiver. Working towards a common fee waiver process was suggested as an option. A separate meeting will be arranged before the end of the academic year to discuss aligning the fee waiver process across the conservatoires.

NP / Group  
members  
CUG237

*CUG230* – Hub Lives and Open Mics are now available through UCAS. This may be a great opportunity to market Conservatoires. UCAS has been interviewing alumni focusing on life after the course and career prospects. The group is advised to contact [r.nevin@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:r.nevin@ucas.ac.uk) for involvement.

*CUG232* – Personal statements is on today’s agenda . Action has been closed.

*CUG236* – Reference wording is in place for 2024. Action has been closed.

**A1/23/03 Operational Update and Operational Issues**

Scott Elliott provided an operational update to the group which showed that, in comparison to last year, overall applicant numbers are down by 19.32%, but with a 3.82% increase in international students. It was noted that the acceptance rate is up from last year.

It was clarified that trends for Conservatoires are consistent with the broader picture across UCAS. However, trends vary between disciplines (music/dance/drama/technical theatre etc.)

The group raised some operational issues.

Points of Entry

When courses are set up in Course Collect, available Points of Entry (PoE) are defined for each course. However, Conservatoires have been receiving unavailable or incorrect PoE selections from applicants. Since the selected PoE isn’t available, these choices haven’t been feeding into student record systems resulting in institutions missing some applications and incorrect offers being made. The Course Collect PoE

Action

data appears not to be connected to the choices available to students when they apply.

The group was informed that the defined PoEs from the collection tool do not currently connect to the application service. UCAS has an item on the roadmap to establish this connection.

A foundation year is only available for certain courses. Confusion is created for applicants presented with this as a choice when it is not available. The group requested that PoE defaults to 'Year 1', which should resolve the confusion for the majority of applicants.

SE  
CUG238

Applicants are unable to see choices, audition dates and decisions on The Hub as default.

Currently applicants have to select 'Your Preferences' on The Hub to view these details. This step is not intuitive for applicants and the default view causes lots of queries to conservatoires. UCAS will look into this as an action.

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CUG239

Applicants declining offers not being able to add an extra choice(s)

If students have received offers and either chosen to decline all of them or been declined through DBD, they may want to add another option for a course in a different specialism, institution or offer timeframe. Currently, they have to ask an institution to re-open a declined offer in order for it to be withdrawn before the applicant can add a new choice. This does not make logical sense and is skewing statistics for Conservatoires since they show as 'withdrawn' rather than 'declined'. The group questioned whether adding an option later could be a possibility if the applicant has not used all of their options. UCAS confirmed this process has been common practice across all applicants and it cannot be changed.

The group have asked UCAS to investigate whether this is an issue common to UCAS UG providers.

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CUG240

The group requested clarity on the deferral process.

Instruments also need to be added onto to course collects for the following cycle.

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CUG241

#### **A1/23/04 UCAS Fair Access Update**

Ellie Rowley delivered an update on Fair Access Strategic Objectives within Journey to a Million.

The future of Undergraduate Admission

Data was delivered on statistics UCAS have seen from applicants in January ECD 2023. The 30% increase forecast from the numbers UCAS see at present has been predicted through data collection, use of demographic information and exponential smoothing. UCAS are looking at the forecasted growth and the impact it will have for widening participation, supply and demand, competition, choices and pathways and student experience. The collection of essays is being publicised in May and June 2023 with a focus on the journey of apprentices.

Outreach Connection Service

This service will be launched in September 2023. The outreach opportunities will be available to teachers and advisers through the Hub. The pilot in January was positive and a couple of developments have been made within the area outreach (nationwide, post code) geography filters. UCAS will be presenting a roadshow in June and July inclusive of a demo and other Fair Access work streams. Once confirmed, the dates will be circulated via the bulletin. If members of the group wish to be involved or find out more information they are encouraged to contact [e.rowley@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:e.rowley@ucas.ac.uk) or [access@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:access@ucas.ac.uk).

The URL will be shared with the group for browsing and referencing fair access data from the Outreach Connection Service. There are WP consultancy and data sets which have an additional cost, but fair access data is free of charge.

ER  
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## A1/23/05 UCAS Events

### What's new for UCAS events?

UCAS have been focusing on supporting young people with pre-event preparation by identifying attendees' mindset early on and facilitating conversations and questions with exhibitors. At the events there are now Q&A support zones and stages. Exhibitor dashboards are now available on [www.ucas.com/providers](http://www.ucas.com/providers) to view visitor numbers, who attended and average leads.

Clarification was requested on the source of information for attendees from the POLAR demographic derive from.

KM  
CUG243

### Improvements for Conservatoires

- Conservatoires have been put together on one stand to reduce cost
- Changes have been implemented to facilitate the exhibitions best e.g. power, furniture, scanning license.
- In Birmingham 2023 the Conservatoire area has been highlighted on the exhibitor list in the zone key.

### Upcoming Events

- Create Subject showcase in London (October) and Manchester (November). The average number of leads is 300, with an applicant conversion being 25.
- Create Your Future Event 2023. The group pointed out that the 2 October date isn't suitable due to proximity to ECD deadline - February or March would be better.

## A1/23/06 Reform

### References

It was confirmed that section one remains as planned. Section two will be for extenuating circumstances. The third section of the references will be 'supportive information' – a space for advisers and referees to talk about the students and their relation to the subject choice more broadly e.g. work experience. Feedback from students and providers will be taken onboard to streamline and help with transparency.

The groups suggestions were as follows

- Special needs, disability and learning difficulties should be captured formally rather than just within the reference.

- Mitigating circumstances for A-levels if there are lower entry requirements is less relevant for Conservatoires due to their high international intake and that A-levels are not the primary basis for admission.

The group are advised to contact Kim [k.eccleston@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:k.eccleston@ucas.ac.uk) to submit example references demonstrating elements that are not currently covered in the proposed templates.

#### Personal Statements

Roadshows and questionnaires took place to ensure the right questions were being asked on the new personal statement model. Feedback from students showed UCAS that they felt uncomfortable having questions on credibility e.g. visa sponsorship from a legal perspective. The survey results suggested applicants should be given a chance to talk about their characteristics and personality however these questions, alongside the readiness for studies and strength in learning styles, will be difficult for students to answer authentically.

The extenuating circumstances section is likely to be taken out of the personal statement and made a part of the application.

#### Feedback from the group

- The group suggested moving extenuating circumstances to the apply section.
- 'Preparation for course' should be a different section when applicants have applied for multiple courses. However, this could add more workload and stress for the students.

All reference and personal statement changes will be live during the May 2025 cycle for 2026 entry.

#### International

A roadmap is in place for helping drive undergraduate international applicants. Document uploads and other reform areas are being looked into.

#### Dates and deadlines

UCAS are looking into the cycle dates and how they help providers. They are reviewing current issues and looking at the possibility of implementing things such as multiple start dates, non-standard start dates for options such as undergraduate, postgraduate, apprenticeships and lifelong learning.

### **A1/23/07 ODBC-Link decommission**

The Group were reminded that ODCB-link will be decommissioned at the end of the cycle in December 2023. It was noted that there would be no 2024 cycle data available via ODBC-link when the cycle opens in Spring/Summer 2023. Members were advised to contact Adam Glaudot at UCAS ([a.glaudot@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:a.glaudot@ucas.ac.uk)) with any questions. All SRS vendors and In-House HEPs are aware of this decommissioning and the group was advised to contact their vendor about their progress with development to accommodate this. The new XML-link functionality needs to be available for the start of September in time for start of the Conservatoire cycle.

The applicant interface will be in a test environment by 2024. In the meantime, test data requests are available via the support portal. It was noted that work would begin early 2024 on the integration of contextual data alongside the application. This 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 reduce the amount of customer contact. Providers will be given a list of reasons, including an 'Other' option with a free text box.

## **A1/23/08 Development Update**

For Confirmation & Clearing a new 'Reason for delayed confirmation' decision functionality will be displayed to the students. The 2024 cycle will show the changes to gender questions, the application fee will now cost £27.50 and the National ID and Dual National ID questions will be removed. New document management functionality to allow PDFs, photos, and word documents to be uploaded is in development.

### Design Framework Version 5 (DF5)

The goal of the new design is to make the user interface as accessible as possible and lay foundations for flexibility going forwards. The product design aligns more with the Student Hub creating a seamless effect. Once it has been updated it will enable UCAS to make regular updates. Dark mode will be responsive to a user's device settings. This is forecasted for the 2024 cycle, available in the middle of July. UCAS will contact Conservatoires when it will be available to use.

### Residency, nationality, and address data collection improvements

Focus groups and webinar sessions have been carried out to make improvements, prevent confusion and reduce unreliable data in relation to fee and residency data.

Key issues to address are:

- Confusion between nationality and ethnicity.
- Visa questions: UCAS are speaking with experts in immigration and visa applications within institutions, to help understand what questions are needed.
- Questions have been suggested such as: Where do you plan to apply for your visas? Have you been refused a visa in the past and if so, why? Have you previously studied on a visa in the UK?
- Settled and pre-settled questions are being shown to students from UK, UCAS will be checking the flow to see why this is happening.

SS  
CUG245

The group agreed it would be useful for students who have lived overseas to have to input an address and whether it could be checked for genuine residency.

A Conservatoire-specific webinar to deep dive into fees and residency, plus document management will be held in the next couple of weeks.

## **A1/23/09 Internal Update**

Janet Warne encouraged the group to inform their recruitment and marketing colleagues to get in touch for guidance on the Hub and support. UCAS' Consultancy

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team can address questions regarding advertising and marketing. Data is available which is more affordable than bespoke data.

Cost-of-living surveys have been carried out by UCAS to identify students' needs with transport, accommodation, and additional costs. The survey results will be circulated to the group after the meeting.

**A1/23/10 Any other business and Close**

The group wanted to give positive feedback to UCAS HEP team as they have been extremely helpful.

Claire Jones has offered to host the next meeting at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. A placeholder for Thursday 19 October 2023 has been agreed.