

## Minutes

CUG/22/M1

Conservatoire User Group meeting

Held on Tuesday 17 May 2022, virtually through MS Teams

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| Chair:              | Elly Taylor   | Royal College of Music   |
| Present:            | Alison Finch-Smith<br>Ashleigh Rice<br>Claire Jones<br>Clare Bezanilla<br>Dean Moody<br>Edward Kemp Luck<br>Emma Mellor<br>Iestyn Henson<br>Justine Spence<br>Karen Edmunds<br>Lindsey Mathie<br>Lucy Bray<br>Luise Moggridge<br>Marchia Abokie<br>Nicola Peacock<br>Sarah Bowden | Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance<br>Royal Northern College of Music<br>Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance<br>Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance<br>Royal Birmingham Conservatoire<br>Royal Academy of Music<br>Royal Northern College of Music<br>Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama<br>Royal Academy of Music<br>Royal Birmingham Conservatoire<br>Royal Conservatoire of Scotland<br>Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance<br>Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama<br>Bristol Old Vic Theatre School<br>Royal College of Music<br>Leeds Conservatoire |
| Apologies:          | Janet Warne   | Customer Success Director  |
| UCAS in attendance: | Andy Frampton<br>Deniz Gosai<br>Louise Cyprien<br>Lynsey Hopkins<br>Nick Quinn  | Customer Success Director<br>Customer Engagement Co-Ordinator<br>Service Delivery Manager (Admissions)<br>Head of Operations<br>Service Delivery Partner (Admissions)  |
| Presenting:         | Clare Cozens<br>Kim Eccleston<br>Phil Bowell<br>Matt Wasley-Wood  | Lead Product Manager<br>Head of Strategy and Reform<br>Senior UX/IU Designer<br>Lead Product Manager   |
| Observing:          | Jo Rackshaw<br>Linda Morris   | Data Collection Support Officer<br>Service Delivery Partner and Manager (Collect)  |

**A1/22/01 Welcome and apologies**

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

**A1/22/02 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:

CUG203 – The action relating to the Hub Live event on the 21 July was closed, however, it was noted that UCAS was intending to put on a couple of Facebook Live events near the 01 October deadline and asked for Conservatoires to volunteer to be part of this.

Group  
CUG224

CUG204 – amends on [www.ucas.com/conservatoires/replying-your-ucas-conservatoires-offers](http://www.ucas.com/conservatoires/replying-your-ucas-conservatoires-offers) had been made and it was noted that website changes could be requested at any point by emailing [n.quinn@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:n.quinn@ucas.ac.uk). The Group highlighted that references had always been an issue as different conservatoires used references in different ways. The wording on the application form now had a tick box for applicants to use if they were submitting their referees directly, however, this was being misinterpreted by applicants who thought it meant that UCAS would contact their referees on their behalf, and it was asked whether this could be looked into.

NQ  
CUG225

Members of the Group had previously reported issues with the wording 'awaiting confirmation' causing confusion with applicants accepting offers. As Janet Warne was unavailable, Nick Quinn agreed to feed this back to the relevant teams at UCAS.

NQ  
CUG226

It was also noted that the distinction between decline and withdrawal was really important. If an applicant withdrew, then their application would disappear. If an applicant received an offer, then they should decline (not withdraw) so that their application was still visible to the conservatoire.

CUG205 – UCAS' Customer Experience Partners had been reminded that applicants needed to be referred to the relevant conservatoire if they were enquiring about fee waivers. It was asked whether the process could be clear, and information added to the relevant pages on the website.

NQ  
CUG227

It was asked whether there was a decision on removing the £26 UCAS application fee for Ukrainian applicants who were currently unable to access funds. It was noted that in the undergraduate scheme there was now the option to pay later and would copy the process for conservatoires, however, there was no plans to remove the fee totally.

CUG212 – UCAS was currently not in the position to progress to removing paper-based references for 2023 cycle, but it was still on the backlog for consideration. It was noted that if the wording on the application page was clearer, then the number of references coming through emails should naturally reduce.

CUG213 – It was confirmed that improving the guidance around audition location selection by applicants could be updated easily, however, UCAS would require a clear direction on what advice would help improve this situation.

CUG216 – Conservatoires had informed Janet Warne of how many applicants they received from the Crimea region, Cuba, Iran, N. Korea and Syria. As numbers were low UCAS was unable to change the situation unless they moved away from using Giga which there were no plans to do so.

CUG218 – It appeared that the reporting withdrawal data issue was with the Royal College of Music only. RCM would look at the problem in more detail.

CUG220 – The Group hadn't volunteered to be part of the redesign of course structure and it was encouraged that they did so when UCAS started to reach out.

### **A1/22/03 Operational update (including Search functionality)**

The 2022 cycle operational events had gone well. Applicant numbers were a little down on last year, and the equal consideration deadline had changed from the 15 January to the last Wednesday of the month, (this year being the 26 January for relevant courses that use the later deadline). There had been a change in behaviour this cycle with 697 applications submitted on the revised January deadline compared to 273 last year on the earlier run of the deadline (15 January). Efforts now were to look forward and support the upcoming RBD/DBDs as well as the start of the 2023 cycle.

Cycle statistics were shared with the Group after the meeting.

### **A1/22/04 Development update**

A UCAS development update presentation was shared with the Group which outlined which areas UCAS was working on. The following points were noted:

- Many conservatoire courses did not use Tariff points as such, since the principal basis for admission was auditions. It was confirmed that UCAS had calculated providers not using the Tariff to facilitate search and ranking in an appropriate order.
- The Course Search filtering options were explained and UCAS proposed to go with option two. One member who had both UG and UC courses agreed that option five would not be viable but was happy with option two providing the text was improved.

### **A1/22/05 Reform update (personal statements and references)**

UCAS had set up a Reform Task and Finish Group prior to the outcome of the DfE Reform Consultation. The work the Group had carried out focused on achievable changes with a fast turnaround which were not affected by the consultation outcomes. A conservatoire representative was present on the Group.

The first focus was on academic references. It was noted that advisers tended to spend a long time writing them, but they were not always used by providers. It had been agreed that they would be split into three smaller sections with specific questions, and the ambition was for the change to go live for the 2024 cycle.

The questions were:

1. Enter a general statement about your school/college (mandatory where not an independent application).
2. Enter any information about extenuating circumstances which may affect this applicant's performance in examinations or other assessments (optional).
3. Use this section to outline any other circumstances specific to the applicant that you think universities/college should be aware of (optional).

The Group was asked to note what they looked for in a reference. Suggestions included:

- Commitment on how the applicant would engage with the course
- Previous experience
- Potential issues
- That the application makes sense
- Applicant is suitable to the programme
- The skills, ability and understanding of the chosen course or career.
- Additional background about WP.
- Information which was nowhere else on the application form.

It was suggested that whatever the questions were, they had to be applicable to postgraduate, international and mature students.

What was meant by the 'general statement about the school or college' was explained. The Group noted that most conservatoire applicants were independent.

UCAS was also looking at improving personal statements. UCAS had surveyed students on their thoughts on the personal statements and although they would like to complete them there was an appetite to change them. The Group noted the following:

- Conservatoire applicants advocate via their audition.
- A proportion of conservatoire applicants did not have English as their first language, and often they copied and pasted their personal statement.

UCAS was carrying out workshops with UG customers to explore personal statements further and agreed that Kim Eccleston and Lynsey Hopkins would be invited to the next meeting to explore it further from a conservatoire perspective.

KE/LH  
CUG228

### **A1/22/06 Applying from the Hub**

The Hub was demonstrated to the Group. The following questions were confirmed:

- Which URL should conservatoires refer applicants to use if they wanted to complete an application quickly just before the deadline? The Start Application button from the Hub.
- There were a number of issues with the 'point of entry' this year and it was asked why it was not compulsory. Additionally, providers set available points of entry in the Collection tool and asked if this could be fed into the application side. This was something UCAS was hoping to do in the future.
- When communicating to applicants, conservatoires should use the phrase 'conservatoire application'.

### **A1/22/07 Any other business and Close**

Action

It was noted that some providers were becoming frustrated by the unique code for single sign on, in particular, how frequently it times you out. Andy Frampton agreed to feed this back and Louise Cyprien agreed to share the hints and tips which was produced for advisers.

AF/LC  
CUG229

The next meeting would be held on Thursday 20 October 2022 at Trinity Laban in London.