

Welcome

Higher education is facing many changes: to funding, regulatory requirements, the United Kingdom's status within Europe, and the ever increasing need to manage students' (or their sponsors') expectations. In this special edition, we focus on how one world-class global institution, University College London (UCL), is coping with and planning for much of this change.

We hear first from Dr. David Stevens, Director of Student Recruitment Marketing, on how his teams are focused on a consistency of approach and the most efficient ways to deliver the information that a prospective student really needs.

We then find out from Raksha Bhalsod, Programme Services Manager at the UCL Institute of Education (IOE), how they have been managing some of the process and technology changes since the merger with UCL.

Finally, in our spotlight this edition, Bella Malins, Director of Access and Admissions, explains the work her teams are doing to improve the numbers of those in under-represented groups attending UCL, alongside improving the efficiency of the whole admissions process for undergraduates and postgraduates.

NEWSFLASH!

London, UK – November 2017

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Recruiting students in a constantly changing environment

Dr David Stevens is Director of Student Recruitment Marketing at UCL. He is responsible for the teams that deliver the broad gamut of activities designed to attract and recruit potential students across the UK and overseas; offsite and onsite; through hard copy and digital recruitment publications and marketing.



David started by telling us how much prospective students have changed over the past years: "Prospective students' expectations are so much greater now. They expect tailored information and instant feedback. They will also source information not just from universities, but from a whole range of places. They will be looking outside the universities themselves, looking at what their peers are saying."

Whilst not in control of the messages given out over social media by current students, or others with an opinion on a course or the institution in general, David stressed how important it is that what UCL do have control over is accurate and that they provide not only information that is requested, but is also relevant to the prospect's needs.

"The balance is giving people what they want, but not bombarding them. There will be a communications plan for any prospective student, so that they will receive a limited amount of core messages, but we are careful that we

"students' expectations are so much greater now"

are not pestering them." To achieve this balance, David explains how technology has enabled UCL to be much more responsive and to tailor their responses to the individual's need: "We record around 100,000 enquiries each

year, either when we meet prospective students in person, or online. We ask them what course they are interested in and where they come from. Of course it would be impossible to communicate directly with each personally, but our automated system filters the right information for that individual. In this way, a UK based prospect interested in undergraduate geography will receive information about that course and student loans etc., whereas someone from Saudi Arabia interested in a post-graduate degree in computer science will receive not only information about that course, but also information about visas, course funding and so on. This means that people can get the information they ask for, plus that which adds value to their original enquiry."

Higher education works within an environment of constant change, and UCL is no different. "UCL is, by quantity, if not proportion, the largest UK recruiter of international students, both EU and non-EU, and we want to maintain our number one position effectively. Obviously, a big change coming up is the 'known unknown' that is Brexit. We know it's coming, but don't know what it will be like. It almost certainly will have an impact and all we can do now is be ready for change as soon as the new parameters become clear."

The other parameters within which the team works are the Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) legislation and the imminent General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). "CMA legislation requires that you do not misrepresent what you can do. Much of our prospective student communications are centralised, but the big change that we are making is that the messages are written at source, following the correct guidance, to ensure that they are in line with both our house style and regulatory requirements. The fact that we have the technology is a great advantage, because we can ask prospects the right questions and obtain the right permissions right from the start."

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Using technology to drive change at the UCL Institute of Education

Raksha Bhalsod is Programme Services Manager at UCL Institute of Education (IOE). We last spoke to Raksha in 2014, when her focus was on identifying and removing inefficiencies in the primary and secondary school placement process. This has had considerable success and now the team are taking the opportunity to revisit the process whilst implementing a new technology system.



Raksha is pleased to report that the improvements in the placements process were "... very successful." She went on to explain that "We have had two or three key achievements, particularly around primary placements. It used to be that by October/November, when students needed to go into school, we would be struggling to place all of them. We were also getting lots of complaints from the programme leader and the programme team. Following the initial Processfix workshop, we used what we had learnt, pulled together the programme leaders and drafted a process map. We identified the processes, how they worked, who needed to be involved,

what the elements were and what needed to change. Now, we don't get complaints from the programme team and in the last two years, we have had no unplaced students."

Raksha highlighted another major improvement: a massive shift in how people perceive things and that they now attribute blame to processes, rather than people. "No one can get upset because it's not emotive. You can't get angry at a process! The team feel they have more ownership and engagement. Within my team there are more conversations about why things aren't working and how can we improve things." Given this success story, we

each other, avoiding duplication and omissions. With Processfix we looked at our subject specific emails process with representative people from all different levels and different parts of the process. Everything was very positive and we have reduced the number of steps from over 40 to just 12. And what is even more positive is that the implementation will be quite straightforward. When given the chance to work together at the workshop, everyone from all parts of the institution came up with the same solution."

If you would like more information about any of the above, please contact David by email: d.stevens@ucl.ac.uk.

"The team feel they have more ownership and engagement"

asked Raksha why they were looking to make more change to the placements process. She outlined the changes that had been ongoing at the IOE since the merger with UCL in 2012. "It has been really interesting, because all the processes are different. But, as with any merger, it takes time to pull things together and work out who is doing what. One significant change is that our current technology is going to be closed off. We need to have a solution and have been through a procurement process to identify what we want our new system to do."

Exciting times and a positive opportunity, but Raksha realised that people were getting very confused about how they would work with the new technology. There was a balance to be drawn between getting the new system and identifying which part of the processes should be changed and which parts it was necessary to hold onto. To overcome this, she asked Processfix to run a workshop to help the team map out processes involved in the implementation of

the new technology. "Not only did we bring in internal staff, but also a couple of tutors who were involved in placements, the Change Manager as we knew there would need to be some communications out of this, and representatives from our IT suppliers. This was really important as they were able to fill the gaps in our knowledge of how the screens would work, for example. It made it so much simpler, as it engaged everyone back onto the road we need to travel and meant that our Change Manager could hear what we would need to communicate, as well as what and how best to do this."

We asked Raksha what is coming up next at the IOE. She told us that, as with the new technology system, one of her aims is to map out any process. "Our issues are not that people are doing the wrong things, we just don't know what they are doing and perhaps there is little understanding of it. That is when you get confusion and frustration and things take ages. If we can get a process map, an overview, it gives people a really clear idea of who is responsible for doing what in a very visual way. The back-up information is important, but the first stage is to identify who is needed to do what."

If you are interested in speaking to Raksha about any of the above, please contact her via email: r.bhalsod@ucl.ac.uk

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"What we're increasingly doing and recently worked on with Processfix, is making sure that we have a consistent approach

"we have reduced the number of steps from over 40 to just 12."

across the central team, faculty teams, other departments and units. We have been exploring ways in which we can work more closely, complementing

In the spotlight: Bella Mails, Director of Access and Admissions at UCL.

Bella is responsible not only for admissions to UCL, where every year brings the challenges of external change, but also for the access team, with responsibility for widening participation and promoting the university to those groups currently under-represented at the institution. Admissions at UCL went paperless five years ago. Changing the admissions system provided the opportunity for significant process change. More recently, Processfix have been brought in to help the team review and make those processes more efficient.

What is happening in the applications world, both at home and internationally?

Admissions is a really interesting environment to work in. Every year something changes! Right now, we have a demographic dip for 18-year olds from the UK, but our EU applications are holding steady and have gone up. Our overseas applications overall continue to go up significantly, as they have over the past 10-15 years. We would expect that we will need to rise to the challenge of Brexit and those application numbers will be affected. As yet, we don't know how much our EU numbers will change, as lots of our EU students don't access UK funding and loans. But they may have to pay higher overseas rates in a couple of years, so we are expecting a dip in applications from the EU and are putting strategies in place to manage this, including reviewing our widening access strategies and increasing recruitment efforts in areas where we believe there are more potential applicants.

One of the other challenges we face relates to the changes to the UK qualifications upon which our offers of admission are based. As the new qualifications are phased in, it is difficult to predict how the changes to GCSEs and A-levels will impact on the results the applicants achieve.

What are the main challenges for the access team?

We are required, along with all other publically funded higher education institutions, to make a significant effort to improve widening access in order to charge the higher rate of fees.

At UCL there is an expectation that we use at least one third of the "top-up" tuition fees we

charge to support those in under-represented groups to access higher education. This is a substantial amount of money and much of this is used in bursaries for students. But there is also a significant amount spent on working with people still at school and in supporting initiatives and posts at UCL that support current students with transitions to university, academic skills, funding and wellbeing.

“we are expecting a dip in applications from the EU”

The main challenges of under-representation lie with the attainment levels of the school leavers; so we orientate much of our work to help raise attainment and assist schools with additional support and resources for students. Raising school attainment presents challenges for universities, as we are not school teachers, but this is where the focus needs to be to help the students reach the levels of attainment they will require to access the courses at UCL and other top universities.

How are you using data to support this work?

To understand more fully where our undergraduates come from, we are trying to build up a more comprehensive contextual data profile. Some of the work we are doing with Processfix is around making our process more efficient in looking at the data around their applications.



Of course, with the advent of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) next May, we are more aware than ever that we hold an awful lot of personal data. We will hold data as long as an application is active; following that we will cleanse the data so that we only hold numbers for those students that did not progress to UCL. At UCL, this is an institution wide project, as there are issues around GDPR that extend beyond admissions and student data.

Why did you bring Processfix back into admissions?

Over the past five years we have been consolidating the work we did when changing the admissions system. But, almost before you know it, you start building and layering on top of efficient processes, adding in work-arounds when issues arise, that actually make you more inefficient!

In the summer, we brought Processfix in to help us streamline the undergraduate admissions processes and are planning to do the same for postgraduate admissions later in the year.

One issue we have been addressing is what, at UCL, is possible and acceptable to automate, and what is not. In admissions, UCAS has a timetable, so there will always be a bulge in the system that is outside your control. For example, Oxbridge have a deadline along with Medicine in October, so there is a peak there;

the other main bulge is in January with the UCAS deadline. This will always bring a certain delay, as it is not physically possible to manage these volumes without being fully automated. This is not a realistic situation for UCL, as our programmes remain selective. What we can do, is try to automate things that we haven't done before, so that staff can concentrate on those things that need a human eye.

We find that the approach of involving people from all levels of the organisation means that buy-in is a lot easier to achieve, as individuals at all levels have considered the issues, such as what should be automated and are empowered to communicate to their peers what has been suggested, how they have contributed and what benefits will be achieved.

In addition, the Processfix workshops allow you to step outside of your everyday life and immerse yourself in the process. Although they are utterly exhausting, they are very rewarding: not only do they give you an achievable action plan, but they change your thinking generally, which is extremely beneficial. You realise how you can apply simple concepts to improve your day-to-day work life.

If you would like more information about any of the above, please contact Bella by email: b.malins@ucl.ac.uk.

About us

Organisations rely on processes to get things done. Often these simply evolve over time and become inefficient ways of working. Processfix bring powerful, proven and behaviour-changing techniques to bear in a professionally facilitated environment.

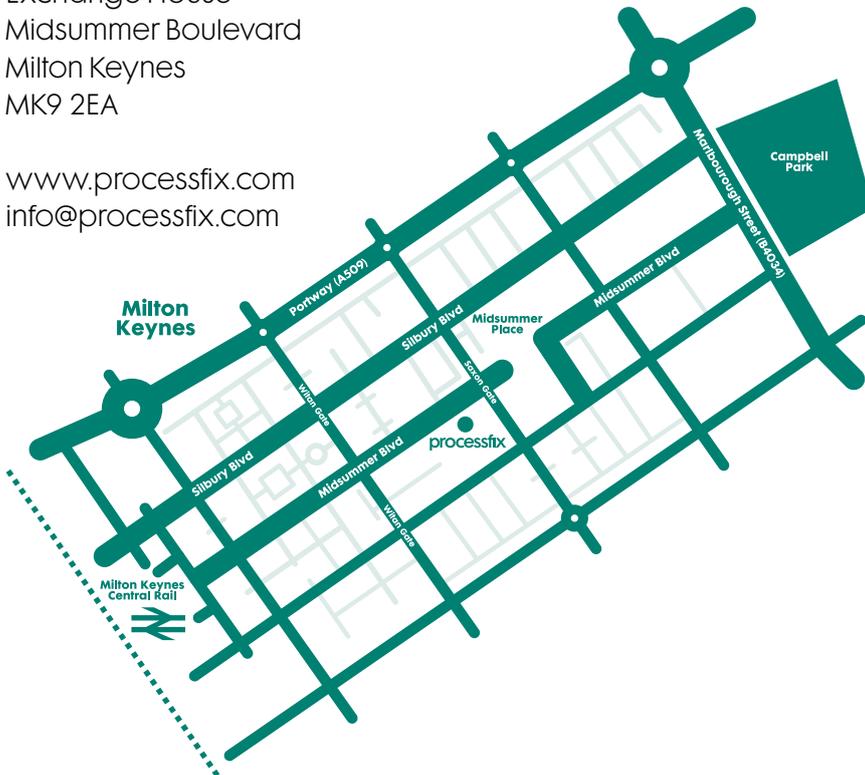
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If you would like to find out how Processfix can benefit your organisation, please contact us at:

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