processfix

UCL

Summer newsletter 2019

Welcome

Two years ago we heard from University College London (UCL) about how they were coping with and planning for the transformation expected from changes in funding, regulatory requirements, the United Kingdom's status within Europe and the ever increasing need to manage students' expectations. In this edition, we return to UCL to see what is happening today.

First we hear from Kate Faxen, Head of Employee Experience, who has been looking outside higher education for inspiration, researching how aspirational companies in other sectors approach the onboarding of staff.

We then find out from Noreen Syed Kassem, Programme Services Manager at the Institute of Education, how, having been successful in transforming the placements process, they are now working to enhance the curriculum development process.

Finally, in our spotlight this edition, Sarah West, Head of Undergraduate Admissions, shares with us how she and her team are looking at the potential of automation to deliver further process efficiencies, as more and more is required from limited resources.

NEWSFLASH!

Birmingham, UK — May 2019
Marks & Clerk launch new trademark process

Silicon Valley inspires transformation of the employee experience

Kate Faxen is the Head of Employee Experience at UCL, which sits within the Organisational Development department. She is responsible for ensuring that right from the moment of receiving a job offer, each individual experiences a smooth transition into UCL and that their subsequent employment is a positive one throughout.

"UCL has traditionally invested a lot of resource in to the recruitment and enrolment of students, but little focus has been placed on the employee experience" explained Kate. "The catalyst to review our on-boarding process came from the appointment of two new directors, one in Organisational Development, the other in HR, who both came to UCL from outside the sector. We started to think about benchmarking our process against aspirational employers, rather than restricting our search to those within higher education."

Kate went on to explain how she and the Director of Organisational Development did their fieldwork. "Stanford, California, stood out to us as being sector leading, and while their approach was vastly better than ours, it also seemed totally achievable to us. Meanwhile, Facebook and Google were identified as those that we might aspire to from outside the sector.

"we want to make things great, not mandatory"

We were lucky enough to visit Facebook in the UK and also to visit Stanford and Google in the US. At Google, we were given a tour around the campus and an insight from a new employee into his on-boarding experience. At Stanford, we were able to attend a staff welcome, a daylong induction event which takes place every Monday. With an intake of 70

to 80 new employees at each session, we observed what practical tools were used, such as iPads, a folio pouch with all the essential information, and perhaps most importantly in the US, immediately available parking permits for both Stanford and the hospital campus. Prior to this approach, new employees were receiving parking tickets on their first day, as the permits had to be picked up from other buildings!"

Back in the UK, Kate launched a Processfix workshop to consider things from a new perspective. "I mentally mapped out and fixed hundreds of processes on my tube journey home! The workshop helped to build relationships with all the people involved in the process. The geography of UCL is such that people are often based in different buildings, or worse, in the same building but don't talk. Having everyone together in the workshop was great; we were able to discuss ideas, get live results and make decisions that everyone committed to. Outcomes that otherwise would take months or years to achieve."

The Processfix workshop helped Kate and her team align their key learnings with what was practical and achievable. "We're in the process of replacing two systems, the HR self-service system and our recruitment system, so it was hard not to pin all our hopes and improvements on those two projects, which are, to a certain extent, out of our control. But we were able to halve the number of steps in the process by making some radical changes. For example, we will encourage new employees to join on the same day as a UCL welcome event, which we'll start holding much more frequently. We were also able to incorporate improvements to the service our new employees can expect, by adding in those 'nice to have' elements that we should have been doing all along."

"With roughly 2,500 new employees joining UCL every year, as at Stanford, we want to make things great, not mandatory in terms of how

Continued on page 2...

Enhancing the curriculum development process

Noreen Syed Kassem is Programme Services Manager at UCL, Institution of Education (IOE). She was first involved in a Processfix workshop back in 2014, on the placements and partnerships process, and is now jointly leading an initiative to enhance the curriculum development process. This will address key operational needs across the faculty in ways that help cohere their integration and implementation; and embed a developmental pathway, which can in turn enrich student experiences and academic provision, as well as feed into wider UCL initiatives.

Noreen shared with us her first experience of a Processfix workshop at the IOE. "I think that was a milestone at the IOE, our first ever engagement with Processfix, and it went really well. During the initial workshop we halved the number of steps in the process. Since scoping our new placements system, we have managed to improve our processes even further, so when the technology has caught up with us, we'll be even more efficient!"

We asked Noreen how differently she felt about the new workshop, as part of the team leading the enhancement of the curriculum development process, compared to her previous experience. "Having been part of a Processfix workshop before, I am excited about the potential we can achieve. When we look back at how we used to work, it's incredible. Now we look at everything with a different mind-set, which helps us move forward incrementally, in a pragmatic and process driven way. I am interested to see the other participants' reactions as they become aware that it is actually empowering to fix their own processes."

She went on to explain some of the issues related to the current project, which she launched with Dr. Myrrh Domingo as academic lead and Beatrice Peries-Brown as quality lead. "As a very large faculty within UCL, one difficulty is not having a clear process for our staff members that require support and guidance to develop new programmes or modules and take them online, accessible to the student body."

"it is actually empowering to fix their own processes"

"We are unique within UCL in that we have our own Quality team, who work closely with the central Academic Services team. With programme approval directly impacting academic provision and student experience and demand increasing about 25% year on year, the IOE Quality team have to manage a multi-layered, multi-stakeholder process that encompasses many discrete processes. This often results in an increase in workload, duplication of and time sensitive activities that do not run in the correct sequence or timeframes. In turn, this limits the degree to which we can encompass a more 'joined up' developmental approach."

The project leaders have gained commitment from the key stakeholders to attend the workshop. "We need to make sure that we involve all the stakeholders: core UCL services, our Quality team, Finance team, Admissions team, academic leads and relevant faculty representation, so that we build a process that will work well across the faculty. We need to build a process that delivers clarity on what is needed by who, by when and what happens when that provision is approved. We want to embed a developmental pathway that ultimately will deliver an enriched student experience."

We asked Noreen what she saw as the main challenges to the success of the workshop. "As always, you need to get the buy-in from all stakeholders. Through the workshop we will present a very robust and collegiate case to show the benefits of the new process, and whoever attends will be able to feed that into the wider academic and professional services community. There is also the potential that we will need to convince the faculty generally, to work to different timelines to ensure we are able to meet central UCL core deadlines for validation activity. As there are already some incredibly busy points in the year, introducing a new process with earlier timeframes may be a challenge. But by demonstrating the overall benefits, alongside the improvement outcomes for our students and staff, we will be in a good place to overcome this hurdle."

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

...Continued from page 1

we welcome them. The UCL equivalent of the Stanford parking permit is our ID card. These come from a central office, tucked away on the main campus. Collecting them can be time consuming, both for the new employee and for other staff who may need to accompany them. By having these ready at the welcome event, the new process will improve for all involved."

We went on to discuss the employee survey. "We are due to run another survey at the end of the year and are considering how we do this, looking at how it adds value. The starting point is that a survey only has value if it enables change, and that employees are aware that the survey enabled that change. As it is currently biannual and incredibly long, we are only now able to promote the changes that have taken place as a direct result of the last survey, thus reducing the overall impact on employee engagement. So, what we've already done is scope out three possible ways forward. It's in its early stages and our next step will be to seek backing from the Chair of the existing Staff Survey Working Group, before then requesting feedback from that group. Once we have their endorsement, we will invite the whole of UCL to lunchtime drop-ins to discuss the proposed new approach.

Alongside this internal stakeholder work, we have also connected with other universities who are going through a similar exercise, to see if there would be value in working with them and aligning our approaches. This again raises the question of who best to benchmark against: inside the sector, as traditionally has happened, or should we venture outside?" In terms of moving processes on and making change, Kate's recommendation is to "look outside as well as within. We often limit ourselves to our own sector, which can be restrictive. But when you take the chance to look at aspirational companies outside, you can see what is possible!"

If you would like more information about any of the above, please contact Kate by email: kate.faxen@ucl.ac.uk.
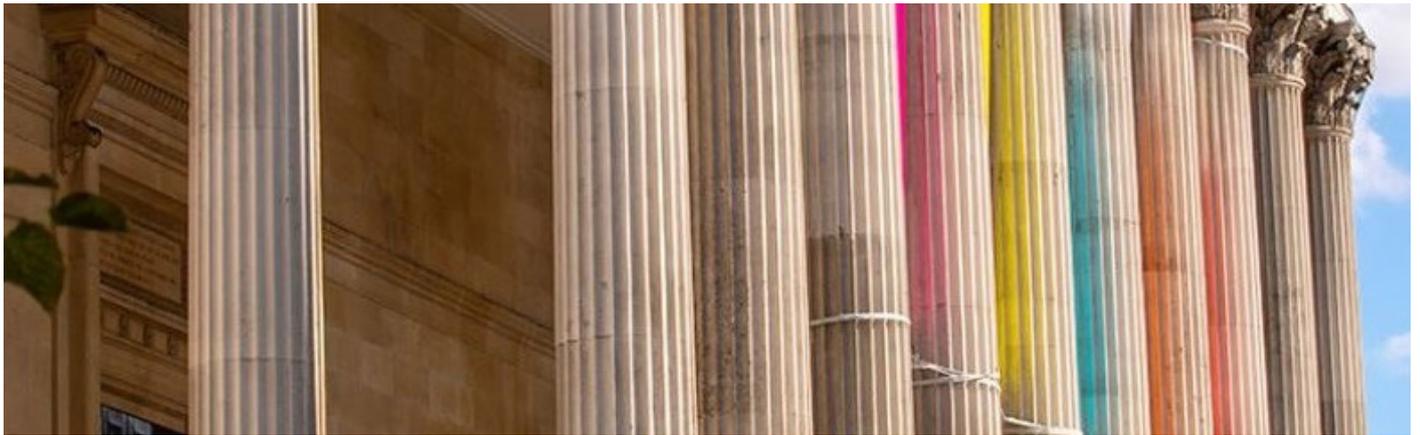
Sarah is responsible for both undergraduate and initial teacher education (ITE) admissions at UCL, a world leading institution where the volume of undergraduate admissions has increased by 27% in the last two years. This increase is driving the need for further process efficiencies, as more and more is required from limited resources.

What would you note as the key pressures on the admissions process right now?

I would say, generally, the volume of applications that we are receiving; an increase in undergraduates of 27% over the last 2 years, and that is similar for postgraduate applications. It may be the national picture, but applications to UCL from overseas continue to increase at a significant rate and our UK numbers remain stable against the background of a demographic dip.

"There will always be the need for human interaction and involvement"

We are not sure what is accounting for the increases, but what we do know is that it has created a large increase in terms of workload. UCAS deadlines haven't changed; applicants still worry and want to be kept informed.

How we manage the increase requires balance though. No one wants to get an offer (or not)

so quickly that they feel it hasn't undergone due consideration, but equally, nor do they want to wait for a long time. We have found that if someone is genuinely interested in a place at UCL, they will hold out before rushing into accepting their first offer from elsewhere, so it is important that we take the time to make sure that we give every application the right amount of attention and get the selection decision right.

Our department and central Marketing keep applicants informed of how our process works and I feel that, generally, applicants today are more understanding now of how things work than in the past 10 years.

How did the Processfix workshop in 2017 translated into reality today?

In 2017, I led a Processfix review of the undergraduate admissions process. I found the workshop sessions incredibly useful in terms of getting people together and giving them time to think about their processes outside of their everyday environment. Even those who were initially sceptical got a lot out of the sessions.

Since then we have implemented a lot of the improvements we generated in the workshop. We did a lot of streamlining that had a big

impact on processing times, without the need to invest in new, or to develop current, technological solutions.

Our processes are robust and it is important that we are fair to all the applicants, to ensure that their application is given the right level of consideration; but due to increasing volumes there is still a struggle to turn applications around within our target timeframe. That's why I think it is now time to look at further automating some processes.

There will always be the need for human interaction and involvement. For example, you couldn't and wouldn't, want to seek a way to automate the review of a personal statement. We only want to look at those things that are straightforward, for example around qualifications and initial fee status assessments. Our next steps will be to pilot this approach to see whether it has the desired effect: meeting turnaround deadlines and making staff workload manageable, or if it in fact causes other problems along the way.

What's next for admissions at UCL?

We have a desire and are required, along with all other publicly funded higher education institutions,

to make a significant effort to improve widening access to higher education. High tariff institutions are coming under significant pressure to close the access gap for under-represented groups.

To help us achieve this goal, a new programme has been launched this applications cycle: the Access UCL scheme. For the first time, wewill have varied entrance requirements based on contextual information about an applicant, lowering entrance criteria for those in under-represented groups by up to two grades if the student is also able to meet certain criteria in extra study modules.

Change and adaptations will always be necessary, depending on the different requirements of government, the institution and the individual academic departments. As a result, the admissions environment must be one of the most outward facing roles within student administration and it's an exciting place to be working.

If you would like more information about any of the above, please contact Sarah by email: s.j.west@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.

We focus on engaging your teams in their own improvement, empowering them to re–evaluate the way they do things and to develop new and improved ways of working that transform performance and deliver immediate results.

Whether you require Rapid Improvement Workshop facilitation, training, project leadership or an organisational wide process improvement programme. Processfix specialise in facilitating your team, delivering immediate benefits and instilling continuous improvement across your organisation.

And Finally…

So what's next for UCL? Read all about the ongoing review of their employee recruitment process in the next issue of the Processfix newsletter

#loveUCL

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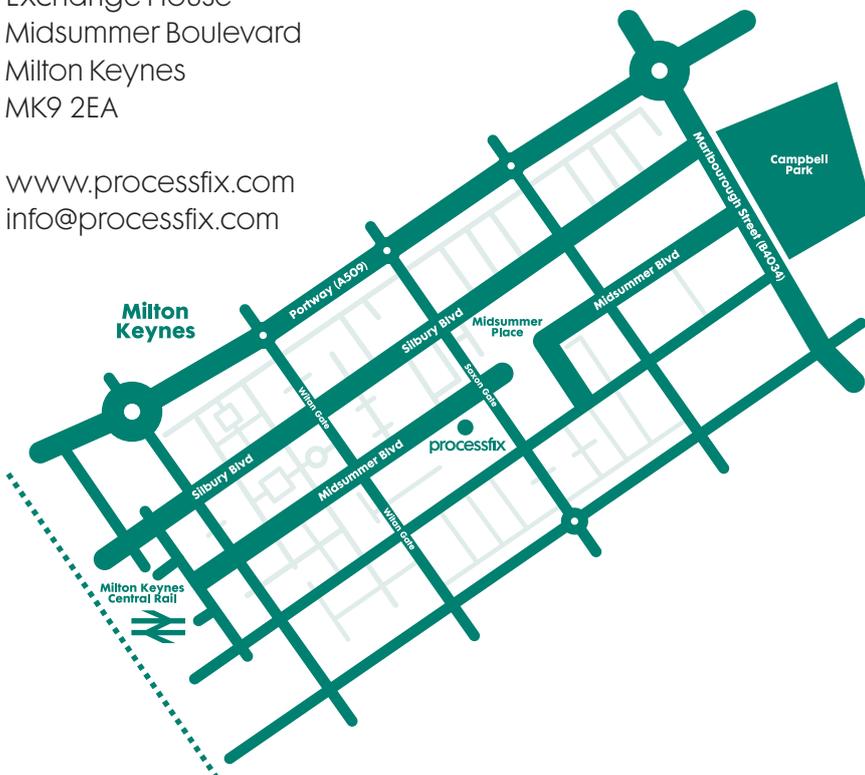
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