

PUTTING NAMES  
TO APPLICANTS

CREATING STUDENT PERSONAS FOR CITY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

# GETTING OUR PAINTBRUSHES OUT

Each year, more than 11,000 people worldwide apply for postgraduate study at City, University of London (excluding Cass Business School).



Around 51% of Postgraduate applicants accept an offer and City wanted to improve this.

With big differences in conversion from offer to enrolment across everything from gender to country, City wanted to develop their content marketing approach to increase this figure.

A one-size-fits-all communications plan just wouldn't do. We needed to paint fuller pictures of the types of students who enrolled.

## WHAT MADE IT TRICKY

The cluster analysis of a huge amount of data is always a challenge. That's why we looked to our own solid persona development process to tackle it. The process helped to untangle the complex elements, and make everything more robust.



# H O W   W E   D I D   I T

Our in-house education, research, copywriting and production experts all worked together throughout the process.

This was a unique online survey sent to current first year students around their motivations, behaviours and drivers for choosing City.

We carried out cluster analysis to group our data into a set of personas. These were based on things like behaviour, emotional journey, drivers and any changes in these throughout the application process.

The findings were then crafted by our creative team into usable personas.

Each persona became a 'person' with their own name, personality, interests, motivations and even social media preferences.

If personas are to be properly used, they need to be fully understood.

To make sure this happened, we created an accessible microsite that showed each persona clearly. It included relevant information from the research in an easy-to-navigate way, as well as multimedia content, descriptive copy and even examples of how to use the personas to full effect for external communications.

Seeing the personas in action made it easier for staff to refer back and use them on a day-to-day basis.



# ENTER OUR SUITE OF PERSONAS

These would enable City to create bespoke messages that would speak more directly to each of them at each stage of the journey to enrolment.

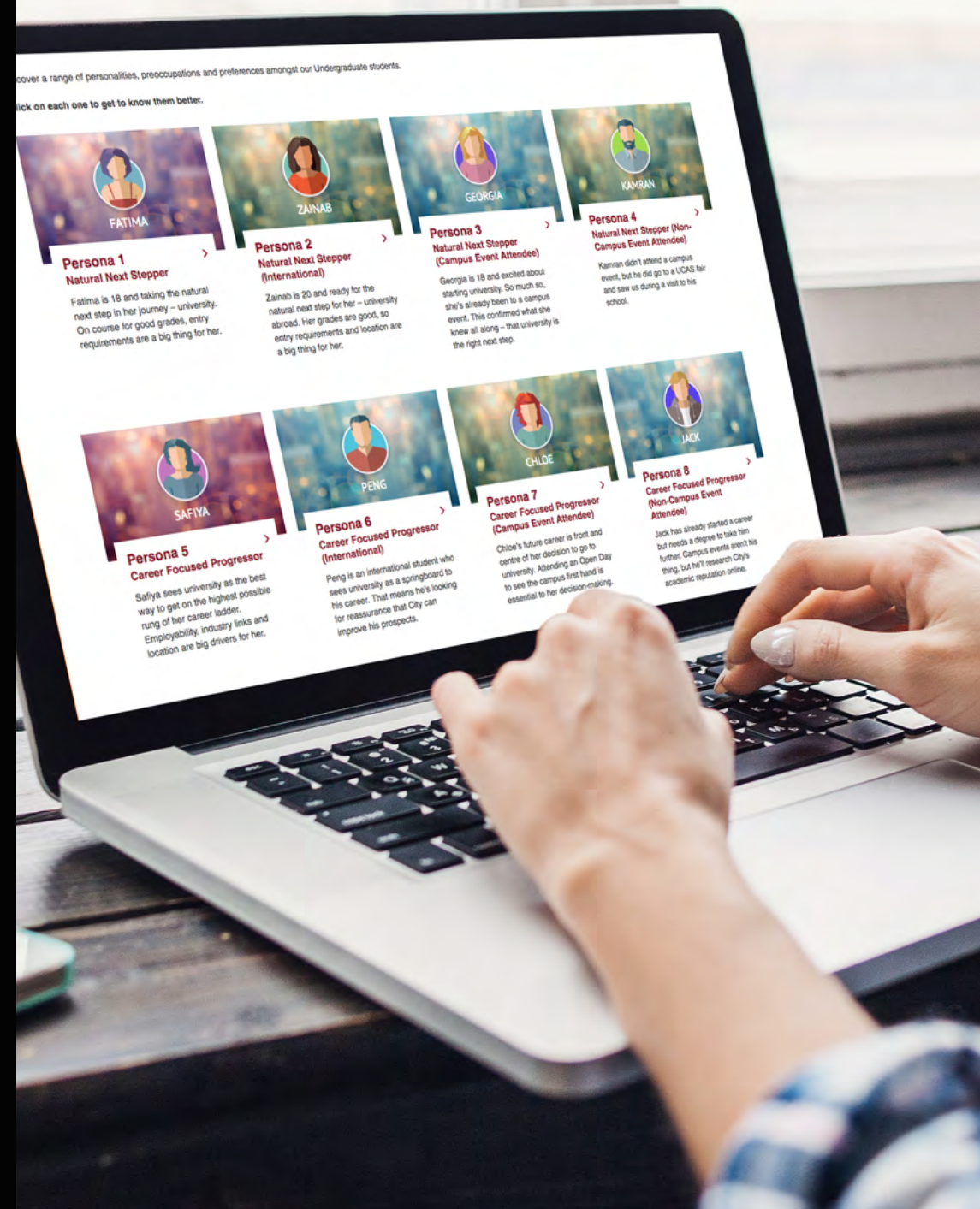
Each persona had a name, gender, age, likes and dislikes, as well as messages they're more likely to respond to at each stage – from initially choosing a university to being kept warm after their offer.

# WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Once the postgraduate project was completed and rolled out, we developed a full suite of personas for their undergraduate audiences too.

We then created a persona user guide for both. This made them even easier to use and highlighted which persona was relevant to each course area.

In addition to printed versions for City's marketing and digital teams, it was also delivered as a workshop. This enabled the personas to be more easily used to influence and inform City's communications in a much more tailored and targeted way.



“We’re delighted. The persona work we partnered with SMRS on is already making a huge difference to the way we communicate, and we’re confident of seeing students responding to messages that are much more tailored to them. The project was incredibly complex, but SMRS made the whole process seem simple and clear.”

**Dominic Davis**

Head of Marketing and Recruitment  
City, University of London