Supporting Professionalism in Admissions

Working together to prepare applicants for the HE admissions process

Higher Education and Schools Partnerships Conference

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What is SPA?

- SPA - the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme

- Established in 2006 following the Schwartz Report *Fair Admissions to Higher Education 2004*

- Small team, with over 70 years management and practical experience between us in the HE admissions sector

- UK's independent and objective voice on HE admissions, reporting to the SPA Steering Group

Good Practice in Admissions: Schwartz Principles

- Be transparent, and provide consistent and efficient information
- Admit students who are able to complete the course as judged by their achievements and potential
- Use assessment methods in admissions that are reliable and valid
- Minimise barriers to applicants
- Be professional in every respect and underpinned by institutional structures and processes.

"Equal opportunity for all individuals, regardless of background, to gain admission to a course suited to their ability and aspirations."

Source: Schwartz Report on Fair Admissions to HE 2004
http://www.admissions-review.org.uk/downloads/finalreport.pdf

SPA – current objectives include:

- The use of contextual data in WP and admissions to higher education
- Interviews – why and how are they used?
- Admissions tests – how many, who's using them, why and how?

What is it?

SPA - Contextual data

- Data, including ‘contextual data’ underpins successful policy, targeting, planning, marketing, widening access and admissions decision-making
- **SPA Principles on the use of contextual data** on SPA website
- SPA discussions with all UK administrations on what data available and how it could be supplied
- UCAS will deliver an initial basket of contextual data to HEIs, free of cost, for 2012 entry
- Need research/ evidence base in universities - operational and academic - that contextual data adds value
- Peer review and discussion. How can SPA help?

Initial basket of data for HEIs

Educational Background	Socio-Economic Background
▪School performance – Average (mean) school GCSE performance for 5 A*-C GCSE (including English/Welsh Maths) ▪Average (mean) school "best eight" GCSE performance ▪Progression from Year 11 to further education ▪School average (mean) of QCA points per qualification **and** per student ▪Progression rates to higher education (% determined by cohort size) from school/college (Scotland only)	▪Percentage of students at the school in receipt of (or entitled to) to free school meals i.e. **not** by individual ▪Percentage of students at the school in receipt of (or entitled to) an Educational Maintenance Allowance (inc. levels??) ▪Lives in a low progression to higher education neighbourhood ▪Socio-economic class IIIM-VII ▪Have been in care for greater than six months *If in red **not** being supplied by UCAS for 2012 at time of application. This is a work in progress.*

Contextual data

- Contextual data must be
- research based and justifiable
- relevant to the purpose for which it is being use (to add context to the admissions decision making process)
- valid and reliable (much of the data is self declared)
- used to improve inclusivity (by recognising potential)
- transparent to applicants and their advisors in terms of what, if any, is used, how it is used and when it is used

http://www.spa.ac.uk/contextual-data/index.html

What are the key considerations?

Is it an interview – and what does that mean?

- If it is a formal interview is the institution clear *why* it is taking place?
- Is the applicant (and is the institution) clear about the difference between a formal interview, which will directly affect the decision made on their application, and an informal chat about the course/mini open day?
- What are the implications of the applicant not attending the interview? Is the applicant clear about these?
- Before, during and after the interview

Good Practice: Interviews - Background

One of SPA's objectives is to encourage institutions to be proactive in the management of the interview process, to ensure applicants are interviewed fairly and without discrimination.

- *'review current admissions practices to improve the evidence base for good practice. Work with practitioners using existing networks to build consensus and identify and disseminate advice and guidance on what constitutes good practice'"*

Good Practice Statement:
http://www.spa.ac.uk/good-practice/interviews.html
(December 2008)

What should HEIs do?

How many undergraduate courses require admissions tests (2011 entry)?

Admissions Tests

- 90 tests in UK for 2011 UCAS entry
- 84 for 2010 entry
  - increase largely explained by greater transparency

- roughly 21% of HE providers in UCAS use tests
- no change from previous year

- less than 1% of courses in UCAS have tests
- no significant change on previous two years

Admissions Tests

- **What makes a good admissions test?**

☑ rigorous validation and reliability testing

☑ supported by statistical and research evidence

☑ minimum of bias in the test questions (valid regardless of background)

☑ readily available and accessible to those with evidence of specific requirements in a timely way

☑ provide exemplar materials and tests with answers

☑ fairly and professionally administered

☑ fit for purpose and adds value as part of decision-making

☑ approved for use through the institution's relevant structures and processes, with institutions' ensuring their appeal and complaint mechanisms cover queries about admissions tests

- **http://www.spa.ac.uk/admission-tests/what-good-test.html**

Admissions Tests

SPA's work around admissions tests:

- annual review of the tests in use in the UK
- exploration into appeals http://www.spa.ac.uk/admission-tests/AT-appeals.html
- meetings with test bodies and consortia
- discussions as part of our visits to HEIs
- admissions tests questionnaire

Admissions Tests

- **Questionnaire findings**

- Differentiation between equally well-qualified applicants
- Demonstration of skills not otherwise tested by application
- Use of a test as a single factor
- Differences in treatment of applicants
- Weightings for test scores
- Publication of previous test scores
- Use of approval mechanisms
- Appeals and complaints
- Research in progress

Thank you, any questions or comments?

More information from: enquiries@spa.ac.uk or 01242 544891
www.spa.ac.uk

Before the interview 1

Provision of clear information to applicants should include:

- How to prepare themselves
- Date, time, duration, location of interview, details of where to report to
- Travel information, accommodation, map
- Structure of the day
- Detail about the interview type and content
- Information about sample questions

Before the interview 2

- Details of any written work that will be sent to the applicant in advance
- Details of any written test, or presentation, that will form part of the interview, or reading required
- Details of any facilities and/or equipment that will be available to applicants on the day
- Details of any documentation applicants should bring with them or send in advance
- Information about sample questions
- The consequence of non-attendance

Conduct of the interview 1

Good Practice Guidelines for HEIs – include:

- Minimum of two trained interviewers
- Mix/balance of interviewers (different genders, ethnic origins)
- Appropriate surroundings – a dedicated room or area
- Facilities/arrangements for those accompanying applicants
- Interruptions and disruptions – *ensure there aren't any*

Conduct of the interview 2

- Chair's responsibilities
- Interviewers' demeanour, approach and dress
- Identification and introduction – of interviewers *and* interviewee
- Interview structure and details to be outlined
- Keep to time
- Regular breaks for interviewers

Conduct of the interview 3

- Opening question
- Interview questions
- Paperwork available to interviewers
- Recording and scoring - specific criteria and final score
- Interview Report Forms
- Materials post interview
- Outcome/post interview process