Supporting Professionalism in Admissions

The role of admissions in improving retention

Retention and Progress in Higher Education 19.4.2012

Janet Graham, Director of SPA

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 75 years strategic, policy 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

Working with HE: The aims and benefits of SPA

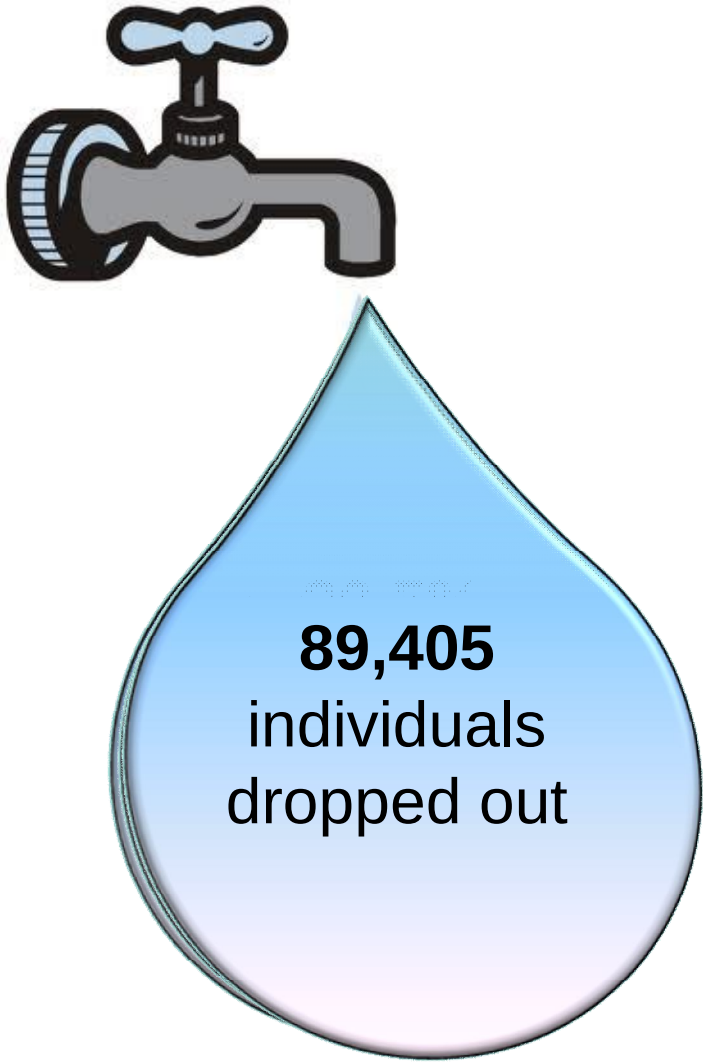
Aims:

- Development of good practice and professionalism in admissions
- Promote fair admissions, access and social mobility
- Integrated strategic approach to admissions

Benefits:

- Evidence based expertise on admissions to HE throughout the UK
- A free resource for institutions who wish to enhance excellence in admissions, recruitment and widening inclusion
- Wide range of good practice, provision of advice and answering queries
- Directly funded by all the UK HE funding bodies, with support from Universities UK and UCAS

HESA Performance Indicators: UK Retention 2009-10



HESA, March 2012

Most common reasons of non-continuance

According to the National Audit Office Reports the seven most common reasons for non-continuation with study are:

1. Personal reasons
2. Lack of integration
3. Dissatisfaction with course/institution
4. Lack of preparedness
5. Wrong choice of course
6. Financial reasons
7. To take up a more attractive opportunity

What is the applicant experience?

The 1994 Group's report in 2007, titled *Enhancing the Student Experience,* highlighted:

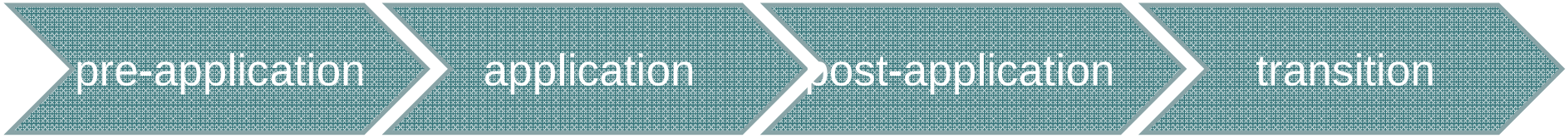
"*A student's experience of university does not begin at the moment they step onto campus at the beginning of October, and it does not end when they are shaking the hand of the Vice-Chancellor at graduation. The* ***early relationship between student and university*** *is important during the applications and admissions process, in* ***preparing students for university life****, and to* ***initiate their engagement with and attitudes towards their university*** *in the best way possible. A student's experience of university can stretch back even further through effective HE engagement with schools and colleges.*"

The Applicant Experience Strategy and Retention

- Strategic leadership in admissions is an integral to an institutions learning and teaching strategy, management and planning.
- SPA's view is that an applicant experience strategy underpins the student experience, it supports the management and processes of both academic and professional staff.
- The benefits for the institution could be
  - **more integrated ways of working, with possible efficiency gains**
  - **enhanced staff professionalism and understanding of strategy**
  - **improved quality practices and procedures which may give competitive advantage, enhance reputation and aid retention**
  - **ability to take advantage of external changes quickly**
- The benefits for the applicant: **transparency, a better experience**

What is the applicant experience?

- Built under four broad stages

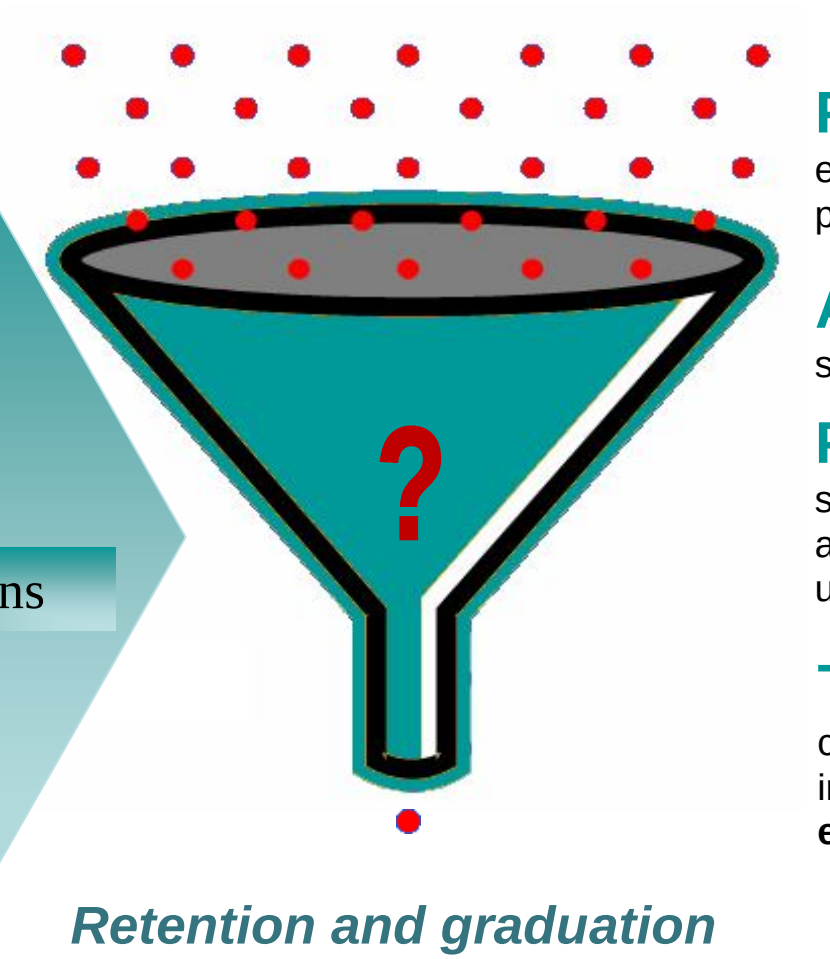


- The applicant experience – the SPA definition

"The applicant experience encompasses all the opportunities or points of interaction between higher education and a potential student."

- **Effective** information, advice and guidance links and underpins engagement through all pre-entry stages and beyond
- *www.spa.ac.uk/applicant-experience*

Who delivers the applicant experience?



Pre-application
enquirers
potential applicants

Application
study choices

Post-application
selection; offers
accepted applicants
unsuccessful applicants

Transition
confirmation
induction
enrolment

Who delivers the applicant experience?

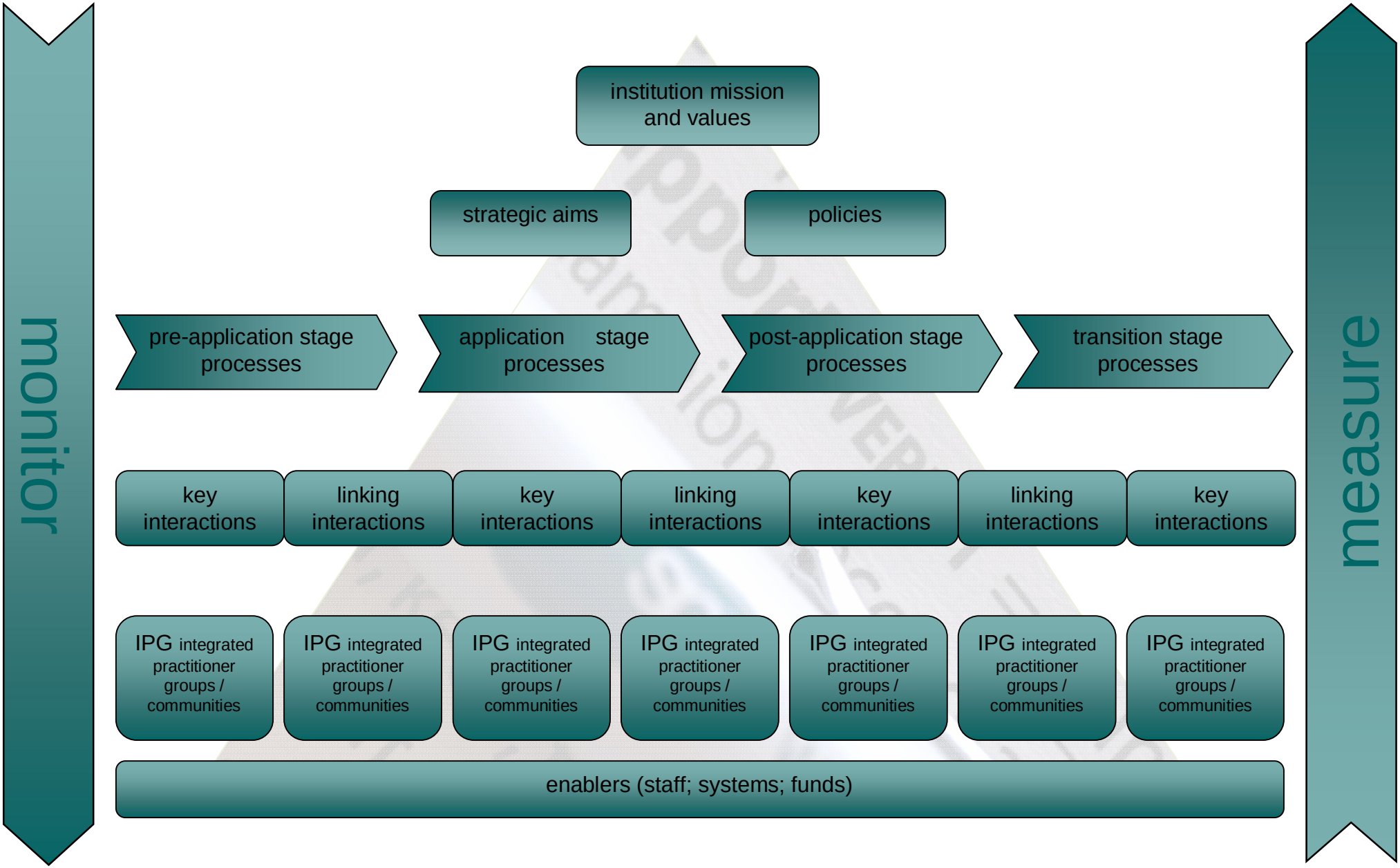
A good applicant experience

- is mutually beneficial to both the applicant and the higher education provider
- prepares, informs and provides equality of opportunity to enter higher education
- should accurately match the student's aims, abilities and aspirations with the character of the institution.
- therefore improves student retention and enhances the strategic mission of the institution

A poor applicant experience

- is inherently detrimental to both the applicant and the higher education provider – *both lose out*
- perpetuates barriers to entry
- disengages potential applicants and their advisors
- risks incongruence between student expectations and institutional character
- therefore embeds an enrolment strategy leading to unfulfilled potential and increased drop-out

The Applicant Experience: collaborative integrated strategy



Recommendations for an applicant experience strategy

1. Pre-application recommendations

1. Engage with learners well in advance of any potential application to initiate and support the applicant experience
2. Utilise experience gained through such engagement to continually inform and improve the applicant experience.

2. Application recommendations

1. Strive to ensure that learner engagement with the application process maximises the institution's ability to identify the most suitable applications
2. Review the quality of applications to measure successful engagement

Recommendations for an applicant experience strategy

3. Post-application recommendations

1. Prepare, review, publish and implement policies well in advance of any consideration of applications
2. To improve conversion and retention rates, understand the type and extent of engagement experienced by an institution's own applicants, students and alumni

4. Transition recommendations

1. Ensure the type and extent of engagement best fits the needs, or intended purpose behind such needs, as determined by the institution's strategic and operational aims
2. Identify the risks of accepted applicants not starting or dropping out shortly after starting their studies at your institution and mitigate those risks, particularly for the most disadvantaged

Want more about the applicant experience?

- More detail on the SPA website:

  www.spa.ac.uk/applicant-experience

- Become a case study institution working with SPA

  talk to Dan Shaffer, Senior Project Officer, ***d.shaffer@spa.ac.uk***
  Tel 01242 544895

- For HE staff: join the SPA/Association of University Administrators (AUA) Applicant Expereince Special Interest Group:

  www.aua.ac.uk/networks/sigs/current/applicant_experience

  Next meeting 10 May 2012, at the University of Manchester

Thank you

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