



2012 HEFCE student numbers: impact on admissions

The below list represents the collated contribution of over 50 institutions at SPA surgeries considering the impact on admissions of changes to HEFCE's student number controls for 2012.

(note: 'AAB+' below refers to all qualifications/grades on HEFCE's equivalency list for exemption from SNC)

Risk area and specific issues	Solutions and recommendations
<p><u>TARGETS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How are targets structured within an institution, who sets them and who has ultimate responsibility for meeting them? ▪ How do you monitor against different targets for exempt and non-exempt home students? ▪ Varied ability to analyse historic data according to new AAB+ and SNC definitions to give reliable trends. Other changes for 2012 (e.g. fees) will add to uncertainty over applicant behaviour and make historic data a less reliable predictor. ▪ SNCs are not known for the key period of admissions cycle when majority of applications received. ▪ Niche areas that don't recruit AAB+ (e.g. music) at greater risk if unprotected ▪ Areas more able to recruit AAB+ may be put under more pressure to do so to compensate for other courses, creating greater divisions in the student mix, with possible negative effects on NSS and student experience. ▪ Setting a separate AAB+ target could prove difficult to justify. ▪ Need to factor in any Access Agreement commitments. ▪ Size does matter – large institutions are better placed to manage targets across a wide portfolio; smaller ones have far less manoeuvrability and fewer resources to keep track and control. ▪ Uncertainty over impact of recruiting over or under SNC, particularly if core reduces whilst exemptions and margin increase in 2013. 	<p>There must be clear and visible senior level commitment to admissions targets throughout the cycle. There should be dedicated management and monitoring of targets, allocating and reinforcing the importance of SNCs within targets and managing reallocation between courses.</p> <p>Ensure each course has a core target (SNC) and a maximum target reflecting its capacity. The difference between the two denotes the maximum number of exempt students that can be taken. Depending on institution strategy, this exemption may be further split across AAB+, ELQs and internationals. The importance of these different targets within an overall capacity should be well understood by all staff involved in course-level selection and overseen by someone with responsibility and authority to manage course-level targets within the institution-level target.</p> <p>Re-examine the portfolio of courses in admissions. Review and discontinue courses that do not recruit rather than allocate them unrealistic numbers. Any decision to discontinue should be made as early as possible to give applicants time to find suitable alternatives.</p> <p>Protect niche areas that have consistently recruited small but stable numbers by giving higher proportion of SNC places than courses that can take AAB+.</p> <p>Institutions that have already started making offers under a single Home target should continue to use a single target for 2012 entry, to ensure all applicants are considered fairly.</p> <p>Consider separate AAB+ targets after equal consideration for courses likely to be full.</p> <p>Operate a gathered field on any courses viewed as 'at risk' or highly unpredictable.</p> <p>Map out your admissions process, highlighting any changes as a result of different targets. This will help staff understand any new decision-making, monitoring or communication.</p> <p>Plan your response to different scenarios of AAB+ and SNC acceptances now to make effective use of the limited time at Confirmation. Plan ahead for any additional resources and training needs.</p>

<p><u>SYSTEMS AND REPORTING</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can IT and reporting tools identify and track AAB+ and SNC applicants? ▪ Software changes need appropriate lead-in time and allocated resources 	<p>UCAS could investigate a way to flag up AAB+ applicants (according to predicted, historic and achieved grades).</p> <p>A sector-wide approach would support any technical developments, particularly in gaining agreement of software houses and UCAS.</p>
<p><u>COMPETITION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The changing face of increased competition adds to uncertainty. Conversion will be less predictable; and conversion from insurance even more so. ▪ New private providers may be able to demonstrate a market advantage, particularly for applicants/parents willing to pay up-front if fees are low and a place is more certain. 	<p>Gather competitor data, including: published fee and bursary info; standard offers; competitor analysis of firms where you are insurance.</p> <p>Respond with more targeted marketing of your own.</p> <p>Focus on your own conversion activities, ensuring you have done as much as possible on aspects under your direct control (run your own race well).</p> <p>Be aware that some providers will accept direct applicants, even if they are firm elsewhere in UCAS.</p> <p>Pay close attention to competitors' offers and behaviour in order to inform your own Confirmation process. Find out if they are planning on taking extra AAB+ even if they miss actual offer as this may affect your conversion rates from insurance.</p>
<p><u>INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How will advisors interpret changes and help applicants make the best match? How well informed are they and will some be at a distinct advantage to play the new system? ▪ Schools may be more likely to over-predict to place applicant in AAB+ category. This makes historic conversion trends less reliable and may backfire on the applicant if actual grades fall below AAB+ and there are no SNC places left. ▪ Internal staff involved in any part of applicant experience need to understand changes. ▪ How will Access Agreement resubmissions be seen by applicants and advisors; how will this affect application dynamic? ▪ Applicants and schools will be more demanding and will want HEIs to be able to justify decisions based on AAB+ that don't match prospectus or policy. 	<p>Central sources (e.g. UCAS; BIS; SPA) should communicate broad changes to applicants and their advisors, ensuring a consistent message and avoided excessive duplication. Individual institutions could then focus on explaining any specific information affecting their applicants only.</p> <p>Involve schools and colleges' liaison staff in getting a clear message out, particularly to key pre-HE contacts.</p> <p>Ensure message about equal consideration is understood and believed.</p> <p>Provide more information to advisors in colleges and schools about the risks of over-predicting. Be clear that an unrealistic AAB+ prediction may actually be to the applicant's detriment.</p> <p>Plan communications to be timely and informative. This may mean shifting some planned dates for sending communications as information may be needed earlier. Applicants may need to discuss information sent them with advisors, parents and peers, so ensure it is in a format that can be readily viewed by others. Ensure all staff in contact with applicants know what communications have been sent and that they share a consistent and informed voice.</p> <p>Provide internal surgeries similar to SPA one: for planning; outreach; finance; marketing; student services; departments/faculties.</p>

	<p>UCAS, UUK, BIS and other agencies should continue to lobby the media for clearer promotion of the benefits of student finance packages and of availability of places.</p>
	<p>UCAS could give an overview briefing to schools and colleges (through its media, website and PD training) on how and why its members may choose to do Extra, Confirmation and Clearing differently this year.</p>
<p><u>DURING EQUAL CONSIDERATION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some may not be in a position to honour equal consideration. ▪ There are different views on what ‘equal consideration’ means. What contractual obligations have member institutions actually signed up to; how is equal consideration defined in those agreements; have all members signed up to the same agreements? ▪ Many offers are likely to be made later, creating more uncertainty for applicants and a worse applicant experience. ▪ There will be greater scrutiny of predicted grades and other qualifications not directly relevant to offer earlier in cycle, adding to delays in offer making 	<p>Agree clarity in your equal consideration definition and consistency in its application.</p> <p>Apply the same entry criteria to all those applying by the equal consideration deadline.</p> <p>Ensure good and clear communication in any new approaches, particularly in explaining gathered field approach (i.e. why there is a wait for offers).</p> <p>Look at alternative indicators of achievement to predict grades: e.g. GCSEs; AS Levels; UMS scores; individual school’s previous level of accuracy of prediction.</p>
<p><u>AFTER EQUAL CONSIDERATION</u> (late and Extra) (replies to offers)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Will later applications be considered as fairly as in the past? ▪ Will there be differential offer making for late and Extra applicants, dependent on whether or not they are exempt from SNC? ▪ Possibility of ASNs later in cycle – e.g. if government responds to youth unemployment or to any dip in WP applications. 	<p>Develop and publish a clear procedural mechanism for handling applications not considered purely because they count/do not count towards SNC. Ideally, applicants should be aware a course is closed to them before they apply to it, but if not then there should be a policy to allow speedy substitution (applicants may substitute choices through UCAS within seven days of application).</p>
<p><u>CONFIRMATION, ADJUSTMENT AND CLEARING</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applicants narrowly missing AAB+ offers could be badly affected at Confirmation and Clearing. There may be more in this category if schools are more likely to over-predict to fit AAB+. ▪ Unclear or ambiguous offers disadvantage both applicant and institution at confirmation. ▪ Some applicants predicted to be exempt may turn out to be under SNC at Confirmation. Likewise, some expected to be under SNC may turn out to be exempt. This will make 	<p>Offers must be clear and unambiguous, so that applicants are clear on exactly what is required before they accept and so that staff can quickly determine whether or not conditions have been met.</p> <p>Restricted character limit on offers via UCAS should be reviewed to ensure full, detailed and clear offers (which may include new fee and bursary information specific to the applicant) can be made and that institutions don’t have to send differently worded offers separately.</p> <p>Senior Management Team should inform central and devolved areas what the institution SNC strategy is and how it will be co-ordinated.</p> <p>Delivering BTECs through ABL will help reduce number of outstanding results.</p>

<p>certainty over numbers more complicated and will take longer to calculate, particularly if it involves qualifications not used as part of the offer. The period between receipt and publication of results may not be long enough, particularly for institutions with fewer resources for, and experience of, such detailed analysis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More complicated and possibly manual analysis will produce delays in providing management information; planning will not be based on up-to-date figures. ▪ Some Confirmation decisions may be delayed and made later, resulting in greater uncertainty and later entry for Adjustment and Clearing. ▪ Mechanism for adjustment and understanding of adjustment rules are not fit for anticipated rise in use (especially for those achieving AAB+). Institutions are more likely to take AAB+ students through adjustment without checking/caring if they have actually exceeded their firm offer. ▪ If Clearing is delayed until several days after A-Level publication, some institutions may feel pressured to make offers in the gap period. Private and Scottish providers may claim the delay period is not relevant to them and continue to actively recruit. ▪ Increased Clearing activity, possibly with institutions not normally in Clearing, but possibly only for exempt applicants. ▪ Possibly more financial incentives offered to keep AAB+ applicants, particularly at Confirmation to avoid adjustment elsewhere. ▪ Possibly more financial incentives offered in Clearing to attract AAB+ applicants, particularly if numbers post-Confirmation are down. ▪ May not be able to determine which courses are in Clearing (or at what grades) as early as in previous years. ▪ The 'no show' rate may be less predictable. ▪ Market behaviour over insurance may be different – historic trends for predicting conversion from CI-UF may no longer apply, particularly where firm offer is AAB+. ▪ Over-recruitment will impact on support services (e.g. accommodation), total spend on scholarships/bursaries, teaching space and staff:student ratios. 	<p>Review UCAS information on Adjustment eligibility and direct better IAG to applicants at Confirmation.</p> <p>UCAS should clarify technical detail of any transaction it sends to insurance HEI if applicant goes UF elsewhere, so that HEIs can ensure it is coded for receipt and identification on their software (or discuss with relevant software houses). Confidence that an insurance application requires no further action could speed up Confirmation processing for some HEIs.</p> <p>More time between receipt of A Level results and publication (or start of Clearing) would give more time to process insurance and review numbers converting to firm.</p> <p>If a delay period between A Level results and Clearing is approved, agreements between UCAS members would need to be in place and have real meaning. Honour agreements within mission groups may prove most effective, as members should be more likely to adhere to an agreement if held to account by peers.</p>
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<p><u>PARTNERSHIPS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Changes will impact on the relationship between franchise partners. ▪ Greater risk of universities taking numbers off partner colleges to protect own courses. ▪ Progression agreements may change, particularly over when application/acceptance needs to be made. ▪ Constant restructuring of HE in FEC poses a greater risk with the current changes – no stability and no policy consistency. 	<p>There must be clear communication between HEI and FEC partners.</p> <p>FECs must have the organisation and structure to deal with partner HEIs and to promote the interests of HE in the college itself.</p> <p>FECs should think about their relationships and where necessary consider what other relationships might better serve their interests.</p> <p>If progression places are guaranteed, better to confirm them as early as possible to give clearer picture of how many places are actually available.</p> <p>SPA/UCAS/AoC should consider issuing general guidance for smaller institutions on admissions policies and principles.</p>
<p><u>LONG TERM VIEW</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decisions in 2012 may impact 2013, particularly if over/under recruitment of SNCs or total population. ▪ How will deferred applicants be treated when HEFCE's 2013 equivalencies are not known yet? ▪ Are HEIs with near misses at Confirmation for full courses more likely to offer a deferred place if they have AAB+? ▪ Opting out may be helpful this year, but no security for 2013 onwards and no clarity on HEFCE's stance after 2012. ▪ HEFCE's equivalency list for exemption could lead to a narrowing of qualifications offered in schools and colleges. ▪ Will student experience and NSS responses be affected if student mix is changed? Will expectations be different? 	<p>Consider any desired changes that may require a lead-in time, either because of IT infrastructure, other suppliers, external negotiation or publication dates.</p> <p>Include any preferred changes in light of new HEFCE funding system in UCAS Admissions Process Review consultation (closes 20 January 2012).</p> <p>Respond to stage two of HEFCE consultation, addressing number controls and teaching funding for new regime students from 2013-14 (opens February 2012; closes May 2012).</p>

Additional resources:

[SPA's briefing paper](#)

[AoC guidance notes](#) (access via AoC members-only area)

[HEFCE's information on student number controls](#)

[SPA's good practice on planning and managing admissions](#)

[AAB+ equivalencies list](#)

[Scenarios](#)