

Autumn 2011: Newsletter

SPA News

We are pleased to announce that SPA has been awarded extended funding to July 2012 taking us into our sixth year. This is an excellent achievement in the current financial climate and in the coming year we will continue to build on our work, as highlighted in the external evaluation report on SPA in July: *'SPA has reviewed the admissions landscape and been an effective contributor to policy fora and there is significant evidence that it has helped HEIs shape their responses to new national agendas. SPA has steered practice and significant change within the sector and admissions work in particular.'* There is an even greater need for the services SPA provides as we move into a new fees and funding regime with increasing differences across the UK; and the team will step up to the challenges and support institutions with advice and guidance, promoting professionalism and good practice in HE admissions.

SPA is delighted to welcome Professor Sir Steve Smith (Vice-Chancellor, University of Exeter) who is the new Chair of the SPA Steering Group. We look forward to working with Sir Steve in the coming year. The team would like to thank Professor David Eastwood (Vice-Chancellor, University of Birmingham) for his support of SPA as Chair over the last two years and wish him every success in his new post as Chair of the UCAS board. Jacqi Hare, Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Cardiff Metropolitan University (formerly UWIC) continues as Vice-Chair.



Key outputs

SPA regularly sends out information on our research, advice and guidance on key issues and topics regarding HE admissions. In the last few months these have included:

- Considerations and areas of good practice around central and devolved decision making models. www.spa.ac.uk/good-practice/centralising_admissions.html.
- Publication of the 9th paperless processing case study – University of Derby, www.spa.ac.uk/national-developments/paperless-processing.html.
- A survey that is informing SPA researchers examining the methodologies, practices and use of

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

- Updated information on the use of admissions tests. www.spa.ac.uk/admissions-tests/index.html
- Recommendations on the Post- Application and the Transitions stage of our Applicant Experience work. www.spa.ac.uk/applicant-experience/index.html
- Good practice in establishing progression agreements from Linking London www.spa.ac.uk/documents/Linking_London_Progression_Agreements.doc
- Contribution to research into implementation of the Unique Learner Number to admissions [www.spa.ac.uk/documents/Learning_Records_Service\(previouslyMIAP\).doc](http://www.spa.ac.uk/documents/Learning_Records_Service(previouslyMIAP).doc)
- An update to our good practice statement on Interviews www.spa.ac.uk/good-practice/interviews.html

SPA Activity 2010/11 Academic Year

In addition to fulfilling our objectives SPA worked with institutions and sector organisations in providing advice and guidance on concerns, policies or issues within admissions to HE relevant to their organisation.

Enquiries provide a useful basis for discussion and highlight areas where SPA can do more work for the benefit of the sector. This in turn feeds into content for SPA events ensuring they are relevant to participants.

We dealt with 138 formal enquiries from across the UK last year, and many more at meetings and events. Of these, 77% were from providers of higher education, with the remainder coming from government and non-government agencies, and covered managing numbers, good practice, contextual data and entry qualifications.

We held four successful events throughout the UK over the last year all of which received strong and positive feedback, enabling participants to use information learned back at their institution:

September 2010	<i>Admissions and Recruitment Planning for 2011 and Beyond</i> , held jointly with UCAS in Leeds
November 2010	<i>Timings of assessment and admissions decisions for applicants with disabilities</i> , a discussion forum held in Cheltenham
April 2011	<i>SPA Seminar: Northern Ireland</i>
May 2011	<i>Good Practice in Challenging Times: Managing the present, looking to the future, working together to find solutions</i> , a conference held in Birmingham

We will be running more events in the coming year.



Our visits to institutions and meetings with sector bodies form a key part of our research, evidence collection and dissemination. During 2010/11 we visited 44 different higher education providers and contributed to over 100 meetings /committees with sector bodies.

SPA 2011/12

SPA's mission is to champion fair admissions and access to higher education by developing and leading on good practice in the recruitment and selection of students.

SPA Strategic Aims 2011-14

With SPA's success and positive impact outlined in the external evaluation, SPA will make a step change upwards in what it does for the HE sector. Our business plan, approved by HEFCE in August 2011, takes this forward through three strategic aims:

(1) Development of HEIs' good practice and professionalism in admissions

SPA is the only organisation in the HE sector recognised as having the knowledge and expertise to work with and for HEIs to produce and promote new good practice, provide advice and guidance on fair admissions. Our good practice development underpins all our other activities. SPA's work in developing new and updated evidence-based good practice to share across the sector will be crucial in providing sector efficiencies so that individual institutions do not have to use resources to meet these challenges on their own. Specific objectives in this area for 2011/12 include complaints and appeals policies; equality and diversity; consideration of different routes into higher education; and feedback to applicants.

(2) Fair admissions, access and social mobility

SPA's good practice enables it to promote fair admissions. SPA is uniquely placed to review what fair admissions means for the sector; the principles, characteristics and practices that it involves. This will enable SPA to ensure it focuses its support and good practice where the impact is most needed to support HEIs in uncertain times in responding to the fast changing HE environment in the UK and its devolved administrations. Specific objectives include reviewing the principles of fair admissions and contextual data use and any transferable methodologies for institutions new to contextual data use.

(3) Integrated strategic approach to admissions

SPA aims to develop and promote an integrated strategic approach or framework for professional admissions. HEIs will be able to use our good practice

for smarter working in their own institutions. This aim will be particularly pertinent to support HEIs in planning and developing internal policy and strategies in admissions under the changing financial and external policy environment. Specific objectives include developing and enhancing work on the applicant experience strategy, planning and managing admissions, and positioning efficient and effective admissions services into a framework of good practice for an integrated approach to managing admissions.

SPA Autumn Events

Admissions 2012: decision and offer-making for full-time undergraduate entry surgeries

SPA will issue a briefing paper in mid-October on issues for consideration in admissions arising from the HEFCE student number control policies.

Following this, SPA is offering three **free** surgeries in Cheltenham on 31 October, 4 November and 7 November. These surgeries will examine practical issues in planning and managing offers and admissions strategies and provide an opportunity for HE staff to network, share ideas and consult on their specific concerns. If you would like to attend one of these sessions, please e-mail r.burchell@spa.ac.uk.

Places are limited, to ensure discussion time for all involved, so please list the dates you are able to make in order of preference. If there is particularly high demand we may run an additional surgery. If a provider is willing to host a session, we would consider offering a surgery elsewhere in the country to discuss this topic at a regional, mission or specialist course level.

And finally...

We hope you have enjoyed reading our update but should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us. We would value your feedback on this Newsletter.

We looking forward to working with colleagues in the HE sector this year

The SPA Team

October 2011