



SPA application recommendations

SPA recommends higher education providers consider undertaking or reviewing the following practice to support a good applicant experience:

1. Strive to ensure that learner engagement with the application process maximises the institution's ability to identify the most suitable

- Unsuitable applications are a waste of time and effort for both applicant and institution, particularly where parties pay for a restricted number of applications, so it would be good practice for institutions and advisors to identify ways to improve engagement and match suitable applicants to courses.
- Applicants may interact with various aspects of the institution before submitting their applications, so management and consistency of information is important, particularly if engagement occurs with areas not involved in the application itself.
- All staff likely to engage with applicants should be trained on the application process and be well aware of who to refer queries to on any application matter falling outside of their knowledge or level of responsibility.
- All institutions have a responsibility to suggest, scrutinise, review, approve and adhere to changes to any admissions operations they are members of (e.g. UCAS).
- It is the responsibility of each institution and of any national service provider they use (e.g. UCAS) to minimise unfair advantage gained from coaching or insider knowledge of the application process.
 - Simple applications should be easy to access and be self-explanatory, using plain language.
 - More complex applications should have all supporting information readily available at no extra charge and have help text in plain language accompanying each section of the application.

2. Review the quality of applications to measure successful engagement

- Clearly define what the purpose of an application is: why each section is needed and what it will be used for; how it is expected to inform the admissions process and what the intended outcomes are.
- An unsuitable application does not necessarily mean that the applicant is unsuitable, so the core goal of a review should be to improve the application engagement and maximise opportunities for applicants to demonstrate their suitability.
- Regularly review application materials and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose, that they do not unduly discriminate against any potential applicant groups and that any supporting information, advice and guidance required to complete a suitable application is reasonably accessible

Dan Shaffer

SPA

July 2010