



## **SPA pre-application recommendations**

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

### **1. Engage with learners well in advance of any potential application to initiate and support the applicant experience**

- engaging with a diverse population benefits individual institutions and the sector as a whole in raising aspirations, widening access, understanding reasons for non-participation and forging links with suitable prospects
- the nature of any engagement should be based upon, and actively reflect, an institution's own mission, so that a realistic impression is made that facilitates a match between prospective applicants and the character of an institution's student body and learning
- engagement to raise aspirations far in advance of any potential application should be planned as part of a long-term strategy to ensure activities will benefit the long-term goals of the institution, rather than just short-term recruitment needs
- collaboration between institutions with similar missions, and with external organisations which promote values contiguous to an institution's mission, may provide an effective way to raise aspirations in a wide cross-section of learners far in advance of any potential application
- the use of student ambassadors may facilitate engagement with non-traditional potential applicants, by realistically promoting the benefits, environment and ethos of the institution, and in an added empathic benefit of bringing together students and potential students who can relate to one another, matching their own qualities with the culture of the institution
- alumni may likewise be an advantageous resource for accurately representing the institution, particularly in highlighting career opportunities, relating with mature prospects and with those already in employment
- further development of UCAS Entry Profiles and institution-own on-line course information, ensuring the quality, transparency and relevance of accessible information, will broaden the opportunity for potential applicants from a wide range of backgrounds to have a similar level of information, regardless of any variation in access to other advisors

**2. Utilise experience gained through such engagement to continually inform and improve the applicant experience.**

- track pre-application activity and interaction through an integrated customer relationship management system to efficiently direct resources and accurately evaluate the impact of initiatives, thus feeding back into the institution's future marketing approach and retention planning
- research the types and extent of pre-application engagement experienced by an institution's own applicants, students and alumni, to improve understanding of which pre-application strategies were successful and indicate any undertargeted areas for future engagement
- apply appropriate geographic information systems modelling and customer relations management tools to more accurately understand the potential pool of candidates for a geographical or demographical area and to appreciate the most appropriate method for promoting within that area to attract those most suited to the institution.

Dan Shaffer  
SPA  
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