## SPA Good Practice:
### Feedback to Unsuccessful Applicants

**November 2012**

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SPA Good Practice Statements

Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme (SPA)

SPA is an independent and objective voice on UK higher education (HE) admissions. It leads on the development of fair admissions, providing an evidence base and recommendations for good practice to help universities and colleges maintain and enhance excellence and professionalism in admissions, student recruitment and widening participation/access. SPA works closely with HE institutions (HEIs) and other stakeholders to provide resource outputs to help HEIs develop and update their admissions practice and policy to enhance quality, transparency, reputation and fairness. Full information on SPA and its work can be found at www.spa.ac.uk.

Statements of good practice

This good practice statement has been prepared by SPA in response to requests from institutions offering HE courses. Our objective is to provide good practice which has been derived from the analysis of evidence collected by SPA from discussions with staff during visits to HEIs, at conferences, evidence from HEIs' policy and practice, and from desk-based research. There are a number of SPA good practice statements which aim to provide a wide range of staff in HE with principles and examples to consider, enabling them to review and update their own policies and practices. Heads and deputy heads of HEIs, senior managers, admissions and registry staff, student services staff, equality and diversity practitioners and student officers and representatives may find the statements of value and assistance.

In the UK admissions standards, requirements, procedures, policies and decisions are the responsibility of each individual HE institution. This principle was affirmed in the Schwartz Report on Fair Admissions (2004)¹ and is set out in law.

Disclaimer

This good practice statement is for general guidance only, and should not be taken as a list of obligations or a legal document. SPA emphasises that it does not offer legal advice and cannot take any responsibility for actions taken based on this information. Institutions must always take their own legal advice as they see appropriate.

SPA good practice statements are kept under review and updated as appropriate. Your comments or updates are invited and appreciated, please contact enquiries@spa.ac.uk

Terminology

In this Good Practice Statement the term ‘HEI’ (Higher Education Institution) will be used to refer to all organisations offering higher education courses, including universities, colleges, FE colleges offering HE and independent/alternative providers.

¹ Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for good practice (The Schwartz Report), September 2004 (accessed January 2016)
1. Introduction

In 2007 SPA released a Good Practice Statement on Feedback to applicants and, as part of our ongoing development of good practice in admissions to higher education, we have reviewed and updated this statement.

While this note is mainly focussed on applicants for full-time undergraduate courses, it is good practice to offer feedback to all applicants, including those for part-time and for postgraduate courses.

The Appendices to the document include examples of some of the communications unsuccessful applicants receive from UCAS and examples of some of the feedback HE Providers are currently providing through UCAS.

2. What is feedback?

Feedback
- is the communication, from a Higher Education provider to an applicant who has been unsuccessful in gaining an offer of a place on the course/programme to which they have applied, information about the reasons they have been unsuccessful. It may also include suggestions as to how they may improve their application.
- may either be on request from the applicant or given automatically to all unsuccessful applicants.
- may be offered, and requested, at any point in the cycle.

3. Entry Criteria

Effective and efficient feedback is easier to provide if entry criteria and details of the processes of considering applicants and reaching admissions decisions are transparent, clear and easy to understand. Such information will normally be included in an HEI’s course or programme information on its website and in UCAS Course Search/Course Discover.

If an HEI’s criteria and processes are clearly laid out, readily available and accessible in different formats it is likely that this will reduce or avoid queries following the receipt of feedback.

4. Why give feedback?

Good-quality, constructive feedback:
- allows applicants to be better prepared for future applications/interviews, provides closure for them and allows them to move constructively forward.
- offers the HEI the opportunity to enhance its reputation, to improve the applicant experience and reduce complaints and queries from disappointed applicants.

Feedback has been endorsed by a number of HE sector organisations, including:
- the Board of Universities UK (UUK), the GuildHE Council and the UCAS Board
- [Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice](#) (The Schwartz Report), September 2004, Paragraph D8, page 35

Feedback is increasingly used across the HE sector by all types of HEI, from large, highly selective institutions to small and specialist colleges. In a survey conducted by SPA in February 2012, 96.6% of HE providers responding stated they offered feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

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2 For information on the Applicant Experience see SPA’s Good Practice Guidance on the subject.
3 Accessed 9 October 2012
4 Accessed 9 October 2012
It is the responsibility of each individual HE institution to decide whether they will offer feedback and, if they do offer it, how it will be offered. However, SPA urges HE providers very strongly to provide feedback wherever possible. In some very rare cases HEIs decide not to give feedback (for example due to a concern that this will give an undue advantage for future applications in very over-subscribed courses such as medicine). If you decide not to provide feedback it is important to be transparent; give the reason why it will not be provided and suggest what other action a disappointed applicant might take to review and improve their application.

5. What is effective feedback?

Good feedback provides the applicant with the means to move forward with their academic and other career plans. It is also a personal communication from an HEI to an unsuccessful applicant.

From the applicant’s point of view, good feedback should:
- give a clear reason why they were unsuccessful
- be in clear and concise language that can be understood immediately
- be written in the second person. It is not appropriate for feedback to consist of a brief reason for rejection in the third person (for example, as appears on an admissions or student records system).

Appendix D has some examples of good (and bad) practice that HE Providers have used. SPA would be grateful for further examples of feedback good practice from HEIs to add to these examples (email enquiries@spa.ac.uk).

Professional courses, such as nursing and social work, often have particularly clear and helpful formative feedback (sometimes in accordance with the requirements of the professional bodies). Constructive feedback of this kind can be used in all subject areas.

HEI policies, information, and transparency

6. HEI policies on feedback

The HEI’s policy on the provision of feedback can be contained within its admissions policy or as a policy in its own right. In any event it is important that the policy is visible to both staff and to applicants. For further guidance in this area please see our Good Practice Statement on Admissions Policies.

Feedback practices may vary depending on the course or programme at an HEI. If this is the case, the details of the different feedback policies and procedures should be set out clearly.

All HEI staff involved in any aspect of admissions, recruitment and widening inclusion should be aware of the feedback policy and be able to explain it to applicants, their families and advisors.

7. Transparency and accessibility to applicants

Information about an HEI’s policy on feedback to unsuccessful applicants should be available on its admissions web pages and through other accessible formats, so that it is available for prospective students, applicants and advisors to read at any stage before or during the application process.

If feedback practices vary depending on the course or programme at an HEI details should be made readily available and explicit, for example, via admissions or course/programme web pages or through UCAS Entry Profiles and their successor pages in Course Discover.
8. No discrimination against applicants requesting feedback

Applicants should be made aware that if they do request feedback or make a complaint, appeal or review under an HEI’s policies and procedures they will not be discriminated against in any further applications on the basis of any of these.

Procedures

9. Audit trail

Universities’ and colleges’ decision-making procedures should include an internal audit trail with accurate records documenting admissions decisions, together with the supporting evidence and reasons for the outcome. These records enable universities and colleges to:

- provide feedback
- justify decisions (including if any are subject to legal challenge)

Universities and colleges will need to decide how long data on unsuccessful applicants should be kept before being archived and/or deleted from systems. This may require advice from the institution’s data protection officer.

10. Quality assurance and monitoring

HEIs will need to consider the quality assurance mechanisms they have in place, to monitor and evaluate the operation of their feedback policies and procedures and report on them through their internal committee structures.

An annual review should highlight to senior and other staff any requirements for change that need to be implemented in the following and subsequent years.

Good monitoring will give institutions the capacity to review both:

- the information provided on courses and entry requirements (e.g. a high proportion of rejections because applicants have grade C in GCSE Maths rather than the required B could indicate a need to clarify published entry criteria)
- implementation and operation of feedback policies and procedures themselves.

11. Who provides feedback

Feedback may be given by various units and individuals within the institution. These may include:

- an academic selector
- the academic unit concerned (e.g. course team, department, faculty)
- the central Admissions Office
- other units dealing with applications

Issues to be considered include the following:

- if the decision has been taken by an academic selector, applicants often prefer to be in contact with him or her as they feel that they are then receiving feedback direct from the key decision maker (and may, perhaps, be able to influence their decision). This can, however, take valuable academic time and can result in a ‘conversation’ as disappointed applicants seek a dialogue.
- if the decision is taken by administrative staff in the Admissions Office, disappointed applicants may feel that they are not speaking to the ‘real’ decision makers and are unable to have the detailed discussion of academic issues which they seek
- if feedback is offered by many different offices throughout the HEI there is the danger of inconsistency and the possibility of inappropriate comments or reasons being given. Clear guidance is needed to avoid this.
Irrespective of which part of the institution provides feedback, institutions with a variety of structures (both centralised and decentralised) have found it helpful to have a central point of contact\textsuperscript{5} for feedback requests (usually the Admissions Office) and a centrally agreed bank of feedback reasons\textsuperscript{6}. This means that:

- routine enquiries can be answered easily and speedily
- inappropriate enquiries can be filtered out at an early stage
- the time of expert staff will only be taken up by non-standard enquiries
- the opportunity can be taken to carefully consider standard answers, to ensure that they have the effect intended and that they contain no comments which might invite further debate or which would expose the HEI to challenge.

Irrespective of who in the HEI is responsible for providing feedback, it is very important that applicants should be clear as to who they should approach to request it.

**When and how to give feedback**

Feedback can be offered at different times. This is a matter for individual HEIs to decide.

12. **Automatic feedback**

Feedback may be given automatically, to all unsuccessful applicants at the time of transmission of the decision. It is worth noting that some of the largest users of feedback find that giving reasons in this way and at this time cuts down the number of enquiries, reduces the HEI’s overall workload and enhances the satisfaction of applicants and their advisers.

13. **Feedback on request**

Other HEIs prefer to offer feedback on request only.

If HEIs decide to offer feedback only in response to requests, they should give guidance on how requests should be made. It may be by telephone or, more commonly by email, letter or web form.\textsuperscript{7}

Some HEIs choose to give applicants a time limit in which to request feedback while others suggest that applicants wait until they have received all of their decisions before requesting feedback.

Under Data Protection regulations a request for feedback should come from the applicant or from someone to whom the applicant gives express and voluntary consent, in writing, to act on their behalf, such as a school advisor or parent.

In determining their procedures HEIs may also decide to acknowledge a request for feedback from an unsuccessful applicant on its receipt and include a date by which a response will be made. This could vary depending on the point at which the request is made within the application cycle.

Feedback policies should give details of response times to a request for feedback.

14. **How to respond to feedback requests**

HEIs will need to indicate how the response to the request for feedback by the applicant will be made. Feedback can be given in a variety of ways, including:

\textsuperscript{5} For example, London School of Economics (LSE), Feedback policy at https://lfylive.lse.ac.uk/lfy/tc/enquiries/enquiry.html?a=4&o=752&searchString= and Feedback Request Form at http://www2.lse.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/howToApply/Feedback/Feedback.aspx, both accessed 9 October 2012.

\textsuperscript{6} For example, University College London (UCL) Undergraduate Admissions Policy, Feedback to Undergraduate Applicants, 58-67, http://www.ucl.ac.uk/academic-manual/part-4/ug-admissions, accessed 9 October 2012

\textsuperscript{7} Arts University College, Bournemouth ‘If I am unsuccessful can I request further feedback?’ http://aucb.ac.uk/before-you-get-here/apply-now/how-to-apply/undergraduate/, accessed 9 August 2012
• In person (for example, in the case of creative subjects where there has been an audition or viewing of a portfolio)
• By telephone (ensuring a record is kept on file) and being sure that the person the HEI is speaking to is authorised to receive this information.
• By letter, email or web based response.
• Via UCAS.

15. The content of feedback
Institutions will need to decide on the nature and extent of any feedback that they make available to unsuccessful applicants (and their advisors).

Applicants and their advisors, understandably, seek a very high degree of detailed personal feedback to assist them with future applications. HEIs may feel that they cannot always meet the expectations due to the pressure of resources and staff time, but any attempt to offer comprehensive feedback is welcomed by the pre-HE sector.

As noted in 11, above, some institutions have found it desirable to have a centrally agreed bank of feedback reasons which can be used throughout the HEI. Such standard answers can be carefully considered in advance to ensure that they have the effect intended and that they contain no comments which might invite further debate or which would expose the HEI to challenge.

SPA has analysed feedback offered by HEIs through UCAS during the Application Year 2010-11 and examples are given in Appendix D.

16. Feedback and advisors
As well as giving assistance to applicants, feedback on applications and on admissions issues is of great interest and assistance to those advising applicants, such as teachers and careers advisors. Good communications with them ensures that applicants in future years will be better prepared and, of course, gives them a good opinion of the HE provider which is offering this feedback.

For reasons of confidentiality feedback on individual applications is only given to the applicants themselves unless the applicant has given express consent to share the information with an advisor. Of course applicants themselves may share feedback with their advisors.

17. Further correspondence about feedback
The way in which an institution deals with any further correspondence from an applicant following the provision of feedback also needs to be considered in any policy. This would include whether the HEI would be prepared to review an admissions decision following a further request by an unsuccessful applicant and, if so, under what circumstances.

If an admissions decision is to be reviewed, the procedure for how this is undertaken, what is taken into consideration in the review, by whom it is reviewed and the timescale involved would need to decided and made available to applicants.

18. Personal information
It is helpful to remember that under Data Protection legislation an applicant always has the right to request personal information recorded about them during the admissions process, whether or not an HE provider decides to offer feedback. For more information discuss the issue with your institution’s Data Protection Officer or consult the website of the UK Information Commissioner.
19. The extent to which HEIs can offer advice to unsuccessful applicants

The QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part B, Chapter B2 (Admissions) Indicator 9 suggests HEIs may also wish to consider to what extent staff in the HEI are able to offer advice to unsuccessful applicants about alternatives and future options for study.

HEI staff may be able to give advice on how an application to their course/subject could be improved in any future resubmission, may suggest an alternative course/programme for which the applicant would be better suited, or give information about alternative entry routes, for example through a college with which it has progression agreements or widening participation links.

If the applicant agrees they could be offered a changed course. This should be discussed with them in advance. If the offer is being made through UCAS, a ‘changed course offer’ cannot be made if a rejection has already been sent.

For general advice applicants should seek guidance from HE advisors at their school, college or careers service, as such staff are likely to be best placed to provide the impartial advice and guidance that unsuccessful applicants need.

Other issues

20. Complaints and appeals

It is not uncommon for some requests for feedback to include a disagreement about the decision-making process or the criteria that were used, or to bring further information to the attention of the HEI.

These are likely to fall under the headings of ‘complaints’ or ‘appeals’ and should be distinguished from ‘feedback’. HEIs are advised to consult SPA’s Good Practice Guidance on Complaints and Appeals for advice on all issues affecting complaints and appeals, and also to refer to the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part B, Chapter B2 (Admissions), Indicators 10 and 11.

21. Admissions staff training and professional development

Staff involved in the admissions process should receive appropriate training and briefing on feedback arrangements and the way in which the reasons for admissions decisions should be documented. One source of training is UCAS Professional Development, which offers training on good practice in offering feedback.

22. Further information

Many of the points covered in this document overlap with different areas of Good Practice that SPA has provided guidance on; we would urge you to look at the Good Practice section of our website.

If you have any questions or comments please contact the SPA Team at enquiries@spa.ac.uk, Telephone 01242 544891.

SPA,
November 2012
Appendices

Appendix A
Feedback decisions through UCAS

In the case of unsuccessful undergraduate applicants, many HE providers give feedback on decisions via UCAS. Since 2007 when SPA published its original Good Practice guidance, and UCAS introduced a facility for reasons for rejection through the UCAS system, the number of ‘feedback’ decisions being made through UCAS has increased enormously; in the admissions cycle 2011/12 nearly 20,000 reasons for rejection were given through this route.

There are, however, a number of restrictions on how this system can be used. These include:

• *When* the decision can be sent. As *Admissions Explained: Providing feedback* says:
  
  You can give a reason for rejection when you send the initial decision, or later over the original rejection, *as long as the applicant hasn't replied to any offers*.

  while the *Admissions Guide and Decision Processing Manual*\(^8\), 8.50 says:

  ‘If the applicant has already replied to their offers, they will have to contact the institution direct to discuss the reason for rejection.’

• *Limit on the number of characters it can contain*. This was a concern when the facility was first introduced but it appears that most HE providers are now able to provide a reason to their satisfaction.

Other issues that were previous concerns – for example a restriction on the number of reasons which could be given - now appear to have been resolved.

**Points to remember when making feedback decisions through UCAS**

• The applicant sees the reasons given through Track and as an AS4 letter, so ensure it is written in a clear and helpful style in the second person. You can see an example of the AS4 letter in Appendix C, below, and on the UCAS site, and one of the Track pages is also included here as Appendix B.

• Regularly check your feedback decision library. Some providers use a very large number of decisions, many of which are virtually identical to each other. A shorter list of key reasons will be easier to use, maintain and give a consistent approach.

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\(^8\) The UCAS Admissions Guide is in the password-protected HE staff area of the UCAS website; please see your institution’s UCAS correspondent if you need access.
Appendix B – Example of what an applicant sees in track

```
: choice details

University / College
Course
Campus
Entry point
Course start date
Live at home
Further details
Criminal convictions declaration
Deferred entry year
Decision
Reason
Your reply

view decision
letter

return to course choices

1
24-Sep-2013
Y
Undeclared
Y
Unsuccessful
Insufficient evidence of a commitment to teaching in Personal Statement
```
Appendix C – Example of AS4 letter showing a feedback decision

FROM
ADMISSIONS
FO BOX 28
CHELTENHAM
GL52 3LZ

CUSTOMER SERVICES
8.30AM 8PM MON-FRI

WWW.UCAS.COM

Date
03 Jul 2012

Personal Id
XXX-XXX-XXXX

Scheme code
UC01

Track username
xxxxxxxxx

Unsuccessful
AS4

Mr X Xxxxxx
Rosehill
New Barn Lane
Cheltenham
GL52 3LZ

Dear Mr Xxxxxx

Your application is no longer being considered by The University of Xxxxxxx for Primary, X120 because either they have decided not to offer you a place or your application has been withdrawn. The reason is given below.

Your application has been unsuccessful

Insufficient evidence of a commitment to teaching in Personal Statement

If you want to have feedback about this decision, you should contact the university or college concerned direct. In order to comply with data protection legislation they may not be able to discuss this with anyone else other than you. Decisions about individual applicants are made by universities and colleges and therefore UCAS does not hold any information about why you have been unsuccessful in this application.

If you are waiting for decisions from the other universities and colleges which are considering your application we will contact you again.

Adding more choices

If you sent fewer than the maximum five choices when you applied, you can add further choices by going to Track on our website. You will need the institution and codes for the choice(s) you want to add. The deadline for adding any choices is 30 June. If you are adding choices after 15 January 2011 (24 March 2011 for art and design courses using a 24 March deadline), please check first with the universities or colleges in which you are interested to see if they still have vacancies.

If you have applied to only one choice, and you would like to add further choices to your application, you will need to pay the full application fee. To add more choices and pay the additional £10 application fee go to Track on our website.

Extra

If you have decisions for all five of your choices but hold no offers, you can apply for one further course at a time through Extra from 25 February to early July. Course Search shows which courses are available in Extra. You can send your application to an Extra choice by using Track.

We will let you know when the university or college gives us their decision on your Extra application. If you are offered a place, you can either accept or decline it. If you decline an offer, or are unsuccessful, you can apply elsewhere through Extra. If you are not made an offer or do not accept an offer in Extra, you will be able to use Clearing.

Clearing

Clearing starts in early July and is an opportunity for applicants without a place to contact universities and colleges with vacancies. If you paid the full application fee of £21 and have no place you will see on Track whether you are eligible for Clearing. You will also see your Clearing Number on Track. If you only had one choice and paid the reduced fee of £11 you need to pay the extra £10 on Track before you can be considered in Clearing. In exceptional circumstances you may call our Customer Service Unit on 0871 468 0 468 to pay the £10 fee. Calls from BT landlines within the UK will cost no more than nine pence per minute. The cost of calls from mobiles and other networks may vary.

We begin advertising Clearing vacancies on our website www.ucas.com from early August following publication of SQA results (Scotland) or 18 August (rest of UK), but you are free to contact universities and colleges before then. If you are waiting for examination results you should wait until they have been published before contacting universities and colleges.

I hope that our explanation helps you to take advantage of the opportunities still available.

Yours sincerely

Andrea Robertson
Director of Customer Operations
### Appendix D

The following examples are based on reasons for rejection given through UCAS, used by HEIs in the 2010-11 Application year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the basis for rejection</th>
<th>Poor example of reason for rejection</th>
<th>Why is it poor?</th>
<th>Good examples of reason for rejection</th>
<th>Why is it good?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audition performance / Portfolio Review</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unsuccessful portfolio review</strong></td>
<td>Impersonal, and no constructive action suggested.</td>
<td>We appreciate the overall quality of your portfolio but feel that your drawing is not yet of an adequate standard for this level of study. We suggest further study and preparation, for example through a foundation course.</td>
<td>If possible, suggest areas they can improve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Portfolio not suitable</strong></td>
<td>Solely emphasises the negative.</td>
<td><strong>While your technical skills are of a high standard, in your interview you did not show a wider understanding of the place and history of the subject in society or an ability to discuss this wider context.</strong></td>
<td>Mention strengths, as well as weaknesses, in performance or portfolio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Better applicants have applied</strong></td>
<td>This is not personalised to the applicant. It is very curt and gives no constructive action for the applicant.</td>
<td>Unfortunately you were in competition with applicants who were stronger academically. Our asking rates are high, but every year the proportion of applicants already holding, or predicted to obtain grades higher than, our asking rates increases. As a result this means some highly qualified candidates have not been offered admission to the University as we simply do not have enough places</td>
<td>Polite and personalised statements. While it does not suggest what action might be taken, it does clearly let the unsuccessful applicant understand that they were less successful in a strong field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Not offered a place</strong></td>
<td>It is already clear to the</td>
<td><strong>Though you made a good</strong></td>
<td>The one problem may be their length - they are nearly 350 characters each.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the basis for rejection</td>
<td>Poor example of reason for rejection</td>
<td>Why is it poor?</td>
<td>Good examples of reason for rejection</td>
<td>Why is it good?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>applicant that they have been unsuccessful, what is needed is an explanation of why and, ideally, what they can do about it.</td>
<td>application overall the University is unfortunately, unable to offer you a place. Those who were invited for interview presented a stronger application in at least one of the following areas: academic profile, understanding of teaching and learning, school experience and the ability to reflect on this. In making this decision we are aware that many good candidates will be disappointed.</td>
<td>Unfortunately you were in competition with stronger academic applicants.</td>
<td>Whilst less personal this gives the same message in a succinct fashion – useful if bound by the number of characters you can use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred Places</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thank you for applying for a deferred place. Unfortunately we do not have any deferred places available for 2012. However, we would be happy to review your application if you reapply from September 2011 for the year 2012.</td>
<td>This is polite, clear and addressed to the applicant and provides clear guidance as to what action can be taken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry Requirements</td>
<td>You have not undertaken essential subjects required for entry</td>
<td>This gives no idea what the essential subject are</td>
<td>You do not have GCSE Maths at grades A*-B (or equivalent Key Skills level 3 qualification) and are not taking a minimum of 3 A-levels and therefore do not meet the entry requirements for Psychology</td>
<td>This makes clear reference to the entry requirements and the fact the applicant has failed to meet them and is personalised to the applicant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the basis for rejection</td>
<td>Poor example of reason for rejection</td>
<td>Why is it poor?</td>
<td>Good examples of reason for rejection</td>
<td>Why is it good?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requirements or admissions criteria.</td>
<td>Your qualifications are not equivalent for entry to our degree programmes</td>
<td>What does equivalent mean?</td>
<td>As discussed, the admissions tutor has fully assessed your application and subsequent information but cannot offer you a place until you have studied and achieved A2 level</td>
<td>This is personalised and makes clear reference to the process undertaken and where the applicant does not meet the requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This would be unfair to the applicant and indicate bad practice on the part of the HE provider.</td>
<td>Applicant can not meet minimum entry requirements</td>
<td>Very impersonal. Gives no idea what the requirements were and how the applicant does not meet them.</td>
<td>Regrettably, your qualifications do not meet the subject requirements for the programme of study for which you have applied. Biology is required at Higher Level in the IB.</td>
<td>This is precise and personalised and gives clear guidance as to the entry requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Information</td>
<td>Information incomplete</td>
<td>It is important to ensure the applicant is aware of the responsibility they have to provide information</td>
<td>You did not respond to our requests for further information</td>
<td>Tells the applicant what was wrong and suggests action to be taken in future applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical and spelling errors within a reason for rejection</td>
<td>Your application details are .... more suitable for ... photogrpahy</td>
<td>Avoid errors – it gives a bad impression of your institution and can be confusing to applicants</td>
<td>You were unsuccessful due to an unsuccessful Interview. You need to give more clarity and depth in answers and you should carry out</td>
<td>Although negative to start with (double use of unsuccessful in the first sentence) the advice given is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Unsuccessful at interview</td>
<td>This gives no useful information that can suggest why the applicant was unsuccessful and what they can do about it.</td>
<td>You were unsuccessful due to an unsuccessful Interview. You need to give more clarity and depth in answers and you should carry out</td>
<td>Although negative to start with (double use of unsuccessful in the first sentence) the advice given is</td>
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<td>What is the basis for rejection</td>
<td>Poor example of reason for rejection</td>
<td>Why is it poor?</td>
<td>Good examples of reason for rejection</td>
<td>Why is it good?</td>
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<td>further research into both the programme and the XXXX profession.</td>
<td>succinct and helpful to the applicant</td>
</tr>
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<td>Personal statement</td>
<td>Personal statement unsuitable</td>
<td>Reason does not state why it is unsuitable and no actions for applicant to take forward</td>
<td>We were concerned by your personal statement which contained numerous grammatical errors and spelling mistakes</td>
<td>Clearly identifies the problem and implicitly suggests corrective action for applicant to take in future applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of evidence in personal statement and brief reference</td>
<td>Reason does not state why this had an impact on the application decision</td>
<td>Your personal statement lacked evidence to support your application and the reference was too brief to add further information for us to consider</td>
<td>Clearly identifies the problem and implicitly suggests corrective action for applicant to take in future applications</td>
</tr>
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<td>Reference</td>
<td>Reference did not meet requirements</td>
<td>Is in the second person – very impersonal. Gives no idea what the requirements were and how the reference did not meet them</td>
<td>While your reference was supportive of your personal character, we require a reference which comments on your academic knowledge, your skills and your suitability for study at the University.</td>
<td>This focuses and comments on the reference which was provided and gives clear guidance on the type of reference actually required.</td>
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<td>Restricted Courses</td>
<td>You do not meet bursary eligibility criteria</td>
<td>While this gives some information, it would be better if the reasons why the applicant was not eligible for a bursary (in this case an NHS Bursary) had been explained.</td>
<td>Following receipt of your completed fee questionnaire, it is clear to us that you do not meet the requirements to be classified as ‘Home’ for fees purposes. Consequently you will not be eligible to apply for an NHS bursary, which is a requirement of the course, and we cannot make you an offer of admission.</td>
<td>This provides clear information as to the process of consideration for the applicant. It also explains the background to eligibility for the course, in this case an NHS Bursary (criteria for different fee statuses will have been given in materials accompanying the fee status)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the basis for rejection</td>
<td>Poor example of reason for rejection</td>
<td>Why is it poor?</td>
<td>Good examples of reason for rejection</td>
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<td><strong>Rejection with the possibility of alternative courses</strong></td>
<td>When an alternative course is to be offered it is always preferable, if possible, to hold an informal conversation with the unsuccessful applicant explaining the options <em>before</em> the decision is sent. If an offer is being made through UCAS, such a process would enable a ‘changed course offer’ to be made. This will generally be more convenient than sending a rejection (even with reasons being given) which would then require the applicant to apply through Extra or Clearing.</td>
<td>Do not leave the applicant with the impression they are unsuited for further study. Take care not to imply there is a guarantee of a place on another course if conditions apply</td>
<td>As discussed, at this time we are unable to offer you the degree as your UCAS tariff is below our standard entry criteria but we have offered you an unconditional place on the Foundation Degree in XXX. XXXX would like to offer a place on the Foundation Diploma in Art and Design as we do not think you are ready for an HE course yet. Please see the letter from XXX University which you will receive shortly, with details of this course offer.</td>
<td>The statement is helpful and positive. Gives specific reasons why an applicant has been unsuccessful and offers an alternative. These statements are helpful and positive. They give specific reasons why an applicant has been unsuccessful and suggests alternatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rejection with the offer of Feedback</strong></td>
<td>If you would like to receive feedback as to why your application was unsuccessful, please contact us</td>
<td>No method for applicant to contact HEI or contact name</td>
<td>Feedback is available on request. Please call the XXX Admissions Team on XXXX XXX XXXX.</td>
<td>Gives specific contact details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Applications received after the 15th October deadline are considered late applications. We have more than sufficient applications received before the 15 October to fill our places. Therefore we will not consider your application.</td>
<td>This is clear and concise, providing a good description why the application is not being considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the basis for rejection</td>
<td>Poor example of reason for rejection</td>
<td>Why is it poor?</td>
<td>Good examples of reason for rejection</td>
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<td>Understanding of the course or profession</td>
<td><em>Does not understand profession</em></td>
<td>Impersonal and no constructive comment for the applicant to move forward</td>
<td><em>While you are well-qualified and committed, you were unsuccessful due to performance at interview. You need to demonstrate a further understanding of the role of the Children’s nurse and articulate exactly why this career is right for you.</em></td>
<td>This clearly states the reason for rejection and what the applicant needs to do to move forward</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Other “general” reasons for rejection | *Lack of understanding of award benefits*  
*Rejected from similar course*  
*Doesn’t fit student profile* | What do these statements mean to an applicant? May also leave the applicant the impression they are completely unsuited to further study | If the reasons for rejection are clear the applicant should not need to contact the HEI - this is good for both the applicant and the HEI. |
Appendix E

Entry Criteria and Application decision-making process

Entry Criteria should be clearly shown on institution websites and in UCAS course information. They should be updated regularly - and at least annually - to reflect any changes in the course, programme or in the HEI.

The criteria and process by which applications are considered will normally be readily available, explicit and accessible in different formats.

The information given might include an indication of the relative importance of the criteria the institution will apply in making the overall assessment of an applicant, and any weighting or scoring system used for the course/ programme.

HEIs will typically assess an application in an objective and justifiable way on the basis of the application and other factors including, for example:

<table>
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<th>level 3 qualifications, grades and subjects required</th>
<th>the number of GCSEs, or equivalent, at a particular grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>portfolio</td>
<td>audition</td>
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<td>interview</td>
<td>a submitted piece of level 3 coursework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contextual data – what data is used, if any, and when used (e.g. as part of decision making process or for monitoring at end of process)</td>
<td>other information available on UCAS Weblink that is not on the copy UCAS application form.</td>
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<tr>
<td>an applicant questionnaire or supplementary information</td>
<td>skills or work experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>scoring or weighting used to assess sections of the application form and other criteria</td>
<td>admissions test results; and score required (if appropriate)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Details of the timescale for making a decision and the order in which the criteria are considered, should also be considered for inclusion in any information. For example, if the information in the application plus certain contextual data and test results are used to determine whether or not an applicant is asked for interview, this should be made explicit and applied consistently.
Appendix F

Feedback to Unsuccessful Applicants - *things to think about*

**What is feedback?**
The communication from an HEI to an unsuccessful applicant information the reasons they have been unsuccessful. It may also include suggestions as to how they may improve their application.

**Why give feedback**
It is recommended by HE sector organisations, including UUK, GuildHE, AoC and UCAS.
It helps applicants to be better prepared for future applications.
It helps the HEI enhance its reputation and improve the applicant experience.

**When to give feedback**
*Either*, on request, *or* automatically to all unsuccessful applicants.

**How to give feedback**
Direct. In person, on the telephone, on a website, by letter or by email.
Through UCAS. Using the feedback facility, for undergraduates applying through UCAS.

**Who should give feedback**
Feedback may be give by academic selectors, administrative staff in academic units or by an admissions office. Some HEIs find that using a bank of standard answers is efficient, gives helpful information to the applicant and offers protection to the HEI.

**Who should receive feedback**
It can be given to applicants, and to others (e.g. advisors) if expressly authorised by applicants.

**The need for record keeping**
It is essential to keep a record of decisions on applications. This enables accurate feedback to be given, can protect the HEI in the event of legal challenge and enables decisions to be monitored for quality purposes.

**Transparency**
It must be easy for applicants and their advisors to find:
- Policies on feedback
- Details of how feedback should be requested

**Examples of feedback given by HEIs**
See Appendix D

**SPA, November 2012**