

Fair admissions to higher education
-a review of the implementation of the
Schwartz Report principles three years
on:

Report 1 – Executive Summary and Conclusions

Centre for Education and Inclusion Research, Sheffield Hallam University and
Institute for Access Studies, Staffordshire University

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2003, the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Charles Clarke, asked Professor Steven Schwartz to lead an independent review of the options that English higher education institutions (HEIs) should consider when assessing the merit of applicants for their courses, and to report on the high-level principles underlying those options. The final report of the Steering Group *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice* (published 2004 and hereafter referred to as the Schwartz Report) set out five Principles which the Group believed formed the basis of a fair admissions system. A number of recommendations were also made to the wider education sector.

1.2 Aims

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) commissioned this review in response to one of the Schwartz Report's recommendations to Government that a further review be undertaken after three years. This review was managed by the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) Programme through a research team based at Sheffield Hallam University. This report, the first of a series of three reports, summarises the evidence reviewed to examine how the principles outlined in the Schwartz Report have been implemented and what changes have occurred in admissions processes in higher education (HE) to support the Schwartz Report's five principles. The second report sets out the full research findings and the final report draws out the themes emerging from the case studies and research and provides a series of good practice guides.

1.3 Methodology

The research methodology consisted of a blend of quantitative and qualitative techniques designed to identify the main factors impacting on how the Schwartz Report was received by the sector. Initially the research team carried out a literature review and designed and administered a survey of senior managers responsible for admissions policy in all UK HEIs informed by the literature, using a combination of questions used in the original Schwartz consultation process and others themed around the five principles (see below). The research team then carried out ten case study visits to a representative range of institutions, focussing again on the five principles and good practice. The research team also carried out a desk

research analysis of institutions' course information web pages and admissions policy information found via institutional websites. Lastly the team carried out a short email survey of key stakeholder groups that had contributed to the original Schwartz consultation.

1.4 *The Schwartz Report Principles*

The five main principles in the Schwartz Report stated that a fair admissions system should:

- Be transparent, and provide consistent and efficient information
- Select students who are able to complete the course as judged by their achievements and potential
- Use assessment methods that are reliable and valid
- Minimise barriers to applicants
- Be professional in every respect and underpinned by institutional structures and processes.

For a list of the Schwartz Report's wider recommendations and comments, see Appendix 1.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 Introduction

Senior managers with responsibility for admissions at all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Further Education Colleges providing HE (non-HEIs) which were members of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) database (a total of 322 institutions as at September 2007) were surveyed in February and March 2008. The overall response rate was 49.6%, with 71% of HEIs and 27% of non-HEIs responding.

The survey consisted of the original questions posed in the 2004 survey with additional questions about the impact of the Schwartz Report, procedures that were undertaken within the admissions decision-making process and whether any changes had taken place since the publication of the Report.

2.2 Key findings from institutional surveys

(i) *Central, mixed or decentralised admissions*

1. Almost half of respondents stated that their institution's admissions decision-making process was a combination in which some admissions decision-making was decentralised (i.e. some if not all admissions decision-making decisions carried out at the level of the school/ department/ faculty) and some carried out centrally (i.e. some if not all admissions decision-making carried out within a central department of the institution). Under a quarter of respondents stated that all admissions decisions were decentralised to a local level, i.e. by the school, faculty or department. Non-HEIs were more likely to have admissions managed centrally than HEIs.

2. A third of respondents stated that their admissions decision-making function had become more centralised since the Schwartz Report, with over half reporting that there had been no change. The main reasons given for change were: general changes in the HE sector, cited by two thirds of respondents; as a result of internal pressure from departments/ faculties/senior management; and changes introduced as a result of the publication of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Code of Practice on admissions to higher education (first published in 2001 and revised and reissued in September 2006), cited by just over half. A

third of respondents reported that the publication of the Schwartz Report was the reason for this change.

(ii) Qualifications accepted

3. All institutions stated that they accept GCE A levels with the majority also accepting Scottish Highers, Scottish Advanced Highers, Welsh Baccalaureate, BTEC, other vocational level 3 qualifications, Access qualifications and qualifications outside the UCAS Tariff. Although some qualifications have been introduced since the Schwartz Report was published, many respondents used open comments to explain that accepting them was part of the normal process of absorbing new qualifications rather than as a result of the Schwartz Report recommendations.

4. There is little difference in the type of qualifications that institutions accept. However, there are significant variations in how these qualifications are publicised, for example while institutions state that they accept vocational qualifications they fail to publicise the fact that they are accepted to the same degree as academic qualifications. This indicates a need for greater transparency in accordance with the Schwartz Report recommendations. The survey findings show that amongst HEIs accepted entry qualifications are generally very well publicised, but this is less true of non-HEIs.

(iii) Other factors in admissions decision-making

5. Respondents were asked what other entry criteria are used for admissions decision-making, whether this had been newly adopted since the Schwartz Report and where this information is publicised. References, individual interviews, personal statements, relevant experience, and work experience/skills were used in over 94% of institutions. Amongst the majority of institutions practice had not changed as a result of the Schwartz Report.

6. Personal contextual data may be used to inform individual admissions decisions. Very few institutions attach weighting to contextual data (e.g. first-generation HE applicant; disability; long-term illness; attending a low-achieving school; looked-after children; and family problems) in admissions decision-making, but HEIs are more likely to attach weighting to such data than non-HEIs.

(iv) Entry Profiles

7. Respondents were asked about the information on undergraduate courses that applicants can access through Entry Profiles on the UCAS Course Search website; the most common information was academic entry requirements, (in 91% of cases), vocational qualifications (77%) and non-academic entry requirements (e.g. work-experience) (61%). These practices preceded the Schwartz Report for three-quarters of respondents.

8. Among the specific types of information included in Entry Profiles were: careers information and course content; bursaries and scholarships, accommodation and learning resources; information on course/modules; assessment; teaching facilities; skills development; financial summary; student support; open days; interviews; criminal conviction checks; mature and international students; entry statistics; advice on writing personal statements; and guidance for referees.

(v) Additional or contextual factors in admissions decision-making

9. Respondents indicated that for the majority of undergraduate courses personal contextual information is not used to inform individual admissions decisions. However, almost half of responding institutions will consider long-term illness and family problems under certain circumstances.

10. Russell Group institutions were the most likely of the mission groups to consider personal contextual information to inform admissions decisions across all the factors identified in the survey, such as attending a low achieving school. Almost all respondents use predicted academic achievement (91%) and previous academic experience at level 3 (95%). Analysis of open comments revealed that commonly used sources were interviews, portfolios and written work.

(vi) New practices adopted since the Schwartz Report

11. Open comments analysis (29 comments) found that six respondents said that all admissions practices and procedures were revised to meet the recommendations of the Schwartz Report; among specific changes introduced, six reported that they had enhanced or introduced transparency, five reported that they now consider applications more holistically and in context, four made changes to make the system more centralised, four to enhance feedback and two institutions reported that they were in the process of phasing out interviews for most courses.

(vii) Monitoring and evaluation of admissions policy and practice

12. A variety of measurements were employed to monitor and evaluate the admissions decision-making methods in institutions. Among methods employed for monitoring and evaluating the reliability and validity of admissions decision-making methods, monitoring of student continuation rates is the method used most often and benchmarking the method least often employed. Other methods highlighted by open comments on the survey were: external input through assessment or examination; internal review either of individual cases, all cases or through review by central and faculty level inspection; annual events to monitor or discuss practices and review cases.

13. HEIs were slightly more likely than non-HEIs to have their own code of practice on admissions. Among methods identified by the 40 respondents making open comments about how such codes are monitored, eight reported that the code was monitored by the admissions team or Head of Admissions; eight that it was by central committee and external audit; seven by central committee, external audit *and* within department/school/faculty; and six by central committee and within department/school/faculty.

14. There was a high usage of monitoring data to inform and update admissions policy for all courses, over half of respondents stated that they use data (institution's own data, UCAS data, other national data sets, institutional student experience data and the National Student Survey) for monitoring *all* courses. Over half of respondents used data annually to inform and update admissions policy for all courses. A smaller proportion of respondents use data more frequently, 12% on a weekly basis.

15. Respondents indicated that at their institution there was a high level of interaction between the admissions decision-making staff and staff involved in widening participation. The most common methods were through the development of projects and by sharing admissions data with the widening participation team. Institutions in the Russell Group were most likely to regularly develop projects with the widening participation team, with institutions represented by GuildHE less likely although still having a relatively high proportion regularly or occasionally developing projects (83.3%) with widening participation teams. Respondents from University Alliance institutions were most likely to take part in pre-application work. The majority of respondents stated that these practices predated the Schwartz Report.

(viii) Comparison to the 2004 Schwartz Report

16. Respondents were asked whether they thought it was important that universities and colleges have students from a wide range of backgrounds. 98% of institutions agreed that this was an important issue, a slight increase on those responding in the same way to the 2004 consultation questionnaire.

17. A majority of respondents, particularly those in HEIs (60.4%), did not believe that universities and colleges should choose students partly in order to achieve a social mix, a significant increase on the third that responded in this way in 2004. Respondents from institutions that are members of GuildHE and the Russell Group were the most likely to state that universities and colleges should choose students in order to achieve such a mix.

18. Almost half (49%) of institutions thought that it was unfair for a university or college to make a lower offer to some applicants than to other applicants on the basis of achieving a mixed student body, a nearly four-fold increase on the comparable 2004 figure of 13%.

19. Over half of HEI respondents thought that an applicant's educational context should be considered in admissions decision-making. Overall 41% of respondents (and over half of HEI respondents) thought that an applicant's educational context should be considered in admissions decision-making, a drop since 2004 when 65% of respondents thought that it should be considered.

20. Almost all respondents thought that it is desirable or necessary to consider additional measures of assessment in admissions outside of specific measures (e.g. portfolios for creative arts courses or auditions for performing arts courses). This was an increase on those who agreed in 2004. It was an issue that was more important for those in HEIs than it was for those in non-HEIs.

2.3 Usability of web-based course information pages

(i) Accessibility

21. The websites of all UCAS member universities and a sample of member colleges were tested for 'applicant-friendliness' by researchers in the review team who were asked to locate course information, analyse the content of course information pages, and locate and analyse the contents of institutional admissions policy statements.

22. Analysis of the number of mouse-clicks that were required to move from each institution's home page to the (pre-selected) course information page showed that around 75% of course pages were found in five clicks or fewer, with 8% in three clicks or fewer.

23. UCAS Tariff points, which are not used by all institutions, were found on course pages in 45% of cases and in 11% of other cases they were found on pages linked from the course page. HEIs are more likely to have UCAS Tariff point information on or linked to the course page than non-HEIs.

24. Information on equivalent qualifications was found either on the course pages (53% of cases) or linked via the course pages to other pages (31%) in 84% of cases.

(ii) Admissions policy statements

25. Overall, of the 201 institutions in the sample, admissions policy statements (defined as containing information on the admissions process, appeals and complaints procedures etc.) were found via links (from the course or home pages) in 97 cases (48%). Links to admissions policy statements were far more likely to be found on HEI pages (61%) than on non-HEI pages (19%).

26. There was some variation by size of institution with admissions policy statements least likely to be found among institutions in the smallest size category (also most likely to be non-HEIs) and most likely in the largest category. Most policies were found within two or three mouse clicks. Admissions policy statements were found via the home page in 56 cases and 40 of them were found within two clicks of the home page (including use of the 'search' or A-Z functions).

27. Three quarters of admissions policies contained information on disability but only a third contained information on the appeals process if an application was unsuccessful. Sixty percent described the application process and around half contained information on feedback and complaints policies. Cross tabulation analysis found that that 27 (28%) of the 97 institutions that had admissions policy statements contained information on all four of the following: application process; feedback; complaints; and appeals.

2.4 Key findings from the case study interviews

28. From the 160 respondents, 59 institutions volunteered to be case studies. Ten case studies were selected from English institutions that responded to the survey. The sampling criteria were: region; size; mission group (or in the case of GuildHE, representative group); institutional type; and specialism. The final selection of case studies were made after consultation with SPA and case study fieldwork was carried out during May and June 2008.

29. The ten case study institutions were: Durham University; Newman University College; Plymouth College of Art and Design; Royal Holloway, University of London; South East Essex College; University of Hull, University of East London; Nottingham University; University of Bolton; University of Warwick.

30. Each case study consisted of, on average, five interviews with individuals with management responsibility for: admissions; widening participation; marketing; student affairs; operational management of policies; admissions to decentralised academic subject areas. Interviewees ranged across Pro-Vice Chancellors (PVCs) and College Principals, Directors and department heads and included admissions decision-makers at all levels in both centralised and decentralised locations.

(i) Responses to the Schwartz Report's recommendations

31. In general, responses to the Report's recommendations and principles were partly governed by institutional mission, and, because of this variation in perspective, case study interviewees showed a general tendency to welcome or highlight aspects of the Report that institutions thought supported their existing practice. As a result many institutions felt they did not need to take any action to review their practices in the light of the Report. Several institutions also highlighted the uniqueness of their institutional strategy and vision and the way in which this had impacted on how the Schwartz Report was received.

32. Institutions which have a large proportion of selecting courses (oversubscribed courses, obliging admissions decision-makers to select from a large number of applicants) noted that where they have many applicants, competition for places had driven them to develop robust admissions policies and approaches to selecting students, competitive pressure that may not apply to recruiting institutions. Selective institutions (those which have more oversubscribed than undersubscribed courses) on the whole welcomed the Schwartz Report because it did

not necessitate reform but was seen as confirming their belief that what they were doing was in line with the principles of fair admissions.

33. Institutions which have a large proportion of recruiting courses (i.e. undersubscribed courses which rarely turn away applicants who meet the required entry criteria) also viewed the Schwartz Report to some extent as endorsing their existing practices: such institutions noted that they were already student focussed and therefore fairness was less of an issue for applicants when fewer are turned down. Much of the content of the Schwartz Report was said to be 'second nature to us'.

(ii) *The impact of the QAA Code of Practice*

34. Case study institutions noted that the revised QAA Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 10, Admissions to HE (2006) generally had more influence on policy and practice than the Schwartz Report, partly because for some institutions the Code contains formal practice recommendations which allow institutions to measure up against its precepts, particularly in relation to feedback to applicants. Institutions review and assess practice against the Code, providing the framework for a system of monitoring and improving procedures. One interviewee noted that: "We see the Schwartz Report as guidance; the QAA as: 'you have to do this'". The Schwartz Report is credited with adding to the evidence base and to the general intellectual framework in which reforms to admissions policy and practice were presented. However, on specific issues the QAA Code of Practice and SPA (especially in relation to feedback to applicants) were seen as more important drivers of change.

(iii) *Staff development and training*

35. Staff development is a continuous process in all the case study institutions, covering issues such as new qualifications, equality and diversity, aspects of management information systems; however there is variable coverage wherever decentralised admissions systems remain. There was clear evidence of increased training being provided to those dealing with admissions, with especially high importance being attached to training in the areas of equal opportunities, applicant interview training, awareness of new vocational qualifications and the QAA Code of Practice on admissions to HE.

36. UCAS Continuing Professional Development (CPD) units and sessions, SPA visits, conferences and networks have a role in staff development and training for most of the

case study institutions: UCAS Wider Picture and the UCAS CPD programme are used in half of the case study institutions and several institutions have occasionally brought in external consultants for staff development. In all the case studies there are various systems in place to cascade or otherwise disseminate new information to the most appropriate level.

(iv) *Pre-HE curriculum changes since the Schwartz Report*

37. Clearly institutional attitudes towards the various curriculum changes that may have occurred since 2004 are driven by their specific institutional missions. The “autonomy” of institutions, schools, faculties or departments also has some impact on how curriculum changes are viewed and there is particular concern among some science subject areas that poor information, advice and guidance in schools and colleges may affect the quality of applicants in the long term.

38. Institutions with mostly recruiting courses emphasised the importance of vocational qualifications and often the prior working experience of their applicants and their vocational ethos and origins as former technical colleges. Five case study institutions (from across the mission groups) declared an involvement with local Lifelong Learning Networks, partnerships to create progression pathways into HE for those on vocational routes.

(v) *Publicity and transparency*

39. Overall, case study interviewees' perceptions of an equitable admissions system have changed as a result of the Schwartz Report in a way which places more weight on the actual academic attainment of applicants. This increased emphasis on one aspect of transparency allows selecting institutions to set expected attainment levels more easily, and to a certain extent this deters applicants who would otherwise apply without the appropriate entry requirements. However, the Schwartz Report does also encourage institutions to link widening participation to admissions through two mechanisms which also contribute to transparency: by centralising their service, which potentially reduces the likelihood of bias from semi-autonomous schools/departments and thus may have an impact in terms of more balanced intakes; and by transparency in relation to entry requirements and any contextual factors which may be taken into account.

40. Selecting institutions among the case studies, particularly those with decentralised schools, departments or faculties, cited problems with the volume and level of feedback they have to provide on request when so many applications are rejected.

41. There is evidence that the combined impact of the Schwartz Report, SPA and the Delivery Partnership have greatly increased the development of Entry Profiles by institutions. However interviewees at two case study institutions voiced reservations about the resource implications, and others voiced concerns that applicants who used Entry Profiles were doing this at the expense of developing an understanding of the institution via its website.

42. Although most of the case study institutions have developed Entry Profiles the research identified variations in how they are viewed, developed and used, and in this case the variations are along organisational rather than mission group lines. Institutions with centralised (or mostly centralised) admissions decision-making teams closely aligned with marketing and/or recruitment are more likely to view Entry Profiles positively and to carry out annual monitoring of content. Generally, issues with Entry Profiles such as difficulty in collecting up-to-date information about courses from departments were cited more regularly at institutions with decentralised admissions systems.

(vi) *Assessing contextual factors*

43. Contextual factors are taken into account in two ways by case study institutions when differentiating between applicants: by interviewing applicants; and by making alternative or differential offers to certain applicants because of mitigating social or personal factors.

44. Among case study institutions four (from across the mission groups) reported that they do not weight contextual factors while another three consider contextual factors for some courses or in some restricted circumstances. Interviews are carried out at the majority of case study institutions for some subject areas.

45. Most of the case study institutions also use contextual factors to identify any necessary support measures to enable a smooth transition for accepted students, and this may include bursaries. In relation to using contextual information, the relationship to widening participation and the wider institutional characteristics are the main determining factors, whilst the selecting/recruiting dynamic also remains a factor.

46. At least one institution reported that admissions decision-makers had hoped to have more clear guidance from the Schwartz Report on the flexibility of grades that would be

expected from applicants where contextual factors are taken into account. Institutions are working towards greater transparency and there are some issues around the need to provide applicants with information which may suggest there can be variations to the published levels at which typical offers are made.

(vii) Admissions and the institutional mission

47. Case study institutions vary to some extent in how and where they express the linkages between admissions policy and practice to their mission and strategy statements. It is clear that institutions of all types are able to sign up to the notions of fair admissions, widening participation and diversity. Each of the case study institutions stressed the link between fair admissions and their institutional mission, though in practice this link was sometimes implicit rather than consistently explicit in published documents.

48. Some case study institutions stressed the importance of their wide range of courses at different levels (e.g. Foundation Year courses) as the key link between admissions and widening participation; others highlighted the importance of access agreements provided to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), the importance of marketing and the general widening participation ethos of their institutions.

49. One mainly selecting case study institution highlighted the importance of the ongoing centralisation process which allowed admissions to come into line with other aspects of the institutional mission under the aegis of marketing, while another mainly selecting case study institution in an area of low participation noted its enhanced relationship with the local region through widening participation work.

50. There is considerable variation in how admissions and the institutional mission are represented by the case study institutions. This is exemplified by complex and increasing interactions between admissions, widening participation and marketing, both in the interaction of staff and policies. Overall there seems to be a trend for centralised admissions services to reflect institutional missions and the marketing, recruitment and widening participation imperatives.

3. **Conclusions**

51. A number of the Principles and recommendations in the Schwartz Report have been successfully adopted by the sector, particularly in relation to some areas of transparency, staff training and Continuing Professional Development, some aspects of professionalism and the use of technology to share resources and information.

52. In terms of its overall impact many institutions suggested that the Schwartz Report was not a major influence on the development of their admissions policies and process, however practice and policy *has* changed and the evidence suggests much of this change relates directly to fulfilment of the Schwartz principles. The QAA Code of Practice, Section 10 on Admissions to HE, which was revised in 2006 in the light of the Schwartz Report, was seen as more directly influential, as have been SPA and the HE sector led Delivery Partnership¹. The development of new pre-HE qualifications and the need for institutions to respond to these in terms of transparency and clarity in entry criteria has also been a contributory factor in changes since 2004.

53. Transparency has been enhanced partly in response to the Schwartz Report recommendation for improved clarity in entry requirements and admissions decision-making which has resulted in UCAS, SPA and the Delivery Partnership giving renewed emphasis to the development of effective Entry Profiles on the UCAS Course Search website. This has greatly improved their development by institutions. General changes to the sector in the form of the introduction of variable tuition fees and the requirement upon English institutions to submit access agreements to OFFA have also contributed to HEIs having the impetus to become more transparent. Variations in how institutions implement transparency reflect institutions' own missions. For example, some selecting institutions benefit from being able to set expected attainment levels more easily, while some recruiting institutions hope that greater transparency will widen the demand base of applicants.

54. There remains a need for greater understanding and consideration of a wider range of qualifications that institutions accept, in accordance with the Schwartz Report recommendations. Generally there is now greater transparency in admissions decision-

¹ SPA was established in response to the Schwartz Report's recommendation for a central source of expertise and advice on admissions issues. The Delivery Partnership was established to deliver a number of reforms to the HE applications process, following a Government consultation on Post-Qualification Applications, as recommended by the Schwartz Report.

making, but there are still some significant areas of concern, for example while institutions state that they will consider vocational qualifications, they do not publicise this in their Entry Profiles as widely as they do for academic qualifications.

55. There is evidence to suggest that views regarding the nature of a 'fair' admissions policy have significantly changed since the Schwartz Report, and changed in a way which is perhaps more risk adverse by placing greater emphasis on actual rather than potential educational attainment.

56. It is not clear from the research whether institutions are getting better in their ability to select those students who can complete their studies. There seems to be more monitoring but less evidence of evaluation, this is also true of the use of assessment methods. It is too early to draw significant conclusions about the usefulness and appropriateness of admissions tests designed to differentiate between qualified applicants such as the national UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT) for medicine, veterinary medicine and dentistry used by 24 HEIs or the subject specific admissions tests developed for use by individual institutions including Oxford and Cambridge, or their overall impact on 'fair' admissions to English HE.

57. There is evidence of a movement towards more centralised admissions decision-making systems and, within more decentralised systems a move towards greater consistency of admission practices, including for example, the introduction of Service Level Agreements that devolved schools/departments agree with the centre. The research suggests that the Schwartz Report has been a significant factor in increasing the centralisation of admissions. However, there are still variations in the nature and extent of staff development activities relating specifically to applicant interviewer training and the sharing of electronic data (between schools/departments within an institution and between the institution and the applicants) and these issues are more prevalent in decentralised systems.

58. There are differences in the development of the principles and processes of admissions practice between institutions that have mainly selecting courses and those that have mainly recruiting courses. One area where this is evident is in the use of contextual information: institutions that have mainly selecting courses may use contextual information to differentiate between highly qualified applicants who meet or exceed the entry requirements for high demand courses. Contextual factors such as school performance or disadvantaged backgrounds may be considered in order to widen participation to underrepresented groups;

institutions that have mainly recruiting courses are more likely to use contextual information to identify applicants who will need additional support to succeed once accepted.

59. There are complex and increasing interactions between admissions, widening participation, student recruitment and marketing, both in the interaction of staff and policies. There seems to be a trend for centralised admissions services to reflect institutional missions and the marketing, recruitment and widening participation imperatives.

4. Glossary of terms used in this report

Centralised/decentralised - admissions decision-making within institutions can be either centralised, with most if not all admissions decision-making located in a central department of the institution, or decentralised, with most if not all admissions decision-making located within departments, schools or faculties.

Delivery Partnership for Improving the HE Application Process - the Delivery Partnership is a UK-wide, higher education sector-led, partnership of different education stakeholders. It was established in autumn 2006 to implement reforms to the higher education applications process following the Government's response to the DfES-led Consultation on *Improving the Higher Education Applications Process* in May 2006.

Entry Profiles – are written by HEIs and are located on the UCAS Course Search website. They give prospective applicants to HE more information about the courses they want to study by providing details about entry qualifications, entry criteria and desirable personal characteristics etc. which may include the relative importance of the criteria plus the process detailing how admissions decisions are made, all on one website.

Fair Admissions - a) the name and subject of what is known as the **Schwartz Report**.

b) General use in the report: Fairness does not necessarily mean the same treatment of all applicants, but all applicants should have the same equality of opportunity. The Schwartz Steering Group stated in the Report its 'opinion that a fair admissions system is one that provides equal opportunity for all individuals, regardless of background, to gain admission to a course suited to their ability and aspirations...admissions should not be biased in favour of applicants from certain backgrounds or schools'.[Section C2, Schwartz Report 2004]

GuildHE - GuildHE is the new name for SCOP (the Standing Conference of Principals), which was originally established in 1978 as the representative organisation for the colleges of higher education. GuildHE (launched in 2006) now speaks for HE colleges, specialist institutions and some universities. It has 22 member institutions and six associate members.

IAG - Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is a term used to describe careers and higher education advice provided by teachers and tutors in schools and colleges, Connexions careers staff and others such as staff from HEIs.

Mission Groups - are used in this report to differentiate between HEI types; they are associations of HEIs sharing particular missions which can be expressed through factors including: the relationship between research and teaching; the profile of applicants and acceptances in the student body; the balance between selecting and recruiting courses offered. Mission Groups referred to in this report are: 1994 Group; Million+; Russell Group; University Alliance (see below). GuildHE, a representative group that speaks for HE colleges, specialist institutions and some universities, is also referred to in this report although it is not a group which is defined by a shared mission among its members.

1994 Group

Established in 1994, this Group brings together 19 research-intensive universities. The Group provides a central vehicle to help members promote their common interests in higher education, respond efficiently to key policy issues, and share best methods and practice.

Million+

Established in 2007, formerly the Coalition of Modern Universities and later CMU: 'campaigning for mainstream universities'. Million+ describes itself as a university think-tank and has 28 member institutions which teach around half of the UK's higher education students each year.

Russell Group

Established in 1994, the Russell Group is an association of 20 research-intensive universities of the United Kingdom. In 2006/07, Russell Group Universities accounted for 66% (over £2.2 billion) of UK Universities' research grant and contract income, 68% of total Research Council income, 56% of all doctorates awarded in the United Kingdom, and over 30% of all students studying in the United Kingdom from outside the EU.

University Alliance

Established in 2006, the University Alliance, previously convened informally as the Alliance of Non-Aligned Universities, comprises a mixture of pre-and post-1992 universities. The 23 member institutions have a balanced portfolio of research, teaching, enterprise and innovation integral to their missions.

OFFA - Office for Fair Access (OFFA) is an independent, non departmental public body which aims to promote and safeguard fair access to higher education for under-represented groups in light of the introduction of variable tuition fees in 2006-07. OFFA requires all publicly funded providers of higher education in England which decide to charge tuition fees above the standard level to submit an access agreement.

QAA - The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established in 1997 to provide an integrated quality assurance service for UK higher education. It is an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges of higher education, and through contracts with the main higher education funding bodies. The QAA's Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education includes admissions to HE. It was first issued in 2001 and updated in September 2006 in the light of the Schwartz Report, as Section 10: Admissions to higher education

Recruiting courses/institutions - recruiting courses are those where there is no oversupply of applicants; in effect all applicants who meet the entry criteria are made an offer. Recruiting institutions are those that have a majority of courses which do not have an oversupply of applicants

Selecting courses/institutions - selecting courses are those where there is an oversupply of applicants who meet the entry criteria; admissions decision-makers have to select from among qualified applicants. Selecting institutions are those which have a majority of courses that have an oversupply of applicants.

SPA - The Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme was established in May 2006 as an independent UK wide programme to support institutions offering higher education programmes, to lead on the continued development of fair admissions, enhance professionalism, share good practice developed from evidence gained on visits to universities and colleges, and to provide advice to senior managers and admissions decision-makers and other stakeholders.

UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. The central organisation which processes applications for most full-time undergraduate courses at UK universities and colleges.

UCAS Course Search – the UCAS website which provides details for applicants and advisers of the 50,000 courses in the UCAS scheme, including Entry Profiles.

UCAS Wider Picture – the UCAS consultancy and staff development programme, mainly schools, colleges and HE advisers focussing on the specification of HE entry requirements, the UCAS Tariff and principles of good offer making, the 14-19 curriculum, fair admissions, widening participation and the electronic transformation of UCAS services.

UKCAT – The United Kingdom Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT) is used in the selection process by a consortium of UK University Medical and Dental Schools. The test aims to help universities to make more informed choices from amongst the many highly qualified applicants who apply for their medical and dental degree programmes.

Widening Participation – assisting more people from under-represented groups, particularly low socio-economic groups, to participate successfully in higher education.

Appendix 1:

Summary of the Schwartz Report recommendations 2004

The 2004 review of admissions to HE (the Schwartz Report) resulted in the following wider recommendations being made to support the five principles outlined in the final report.

For the full text of the recommendations, please visit <http://www.admissions-review.org.uk/>

The Schwartz Report's wider recommendations and comments:

- 1.1. Quality Assurance Agency to review their code of practice relating to recruitment and admissions in light of the Schwartz Report and a more consistent implementation of the code of practice by institutions.
- 1.2. Post qualification applications (**PQA**). The Schwartz Report asked that the Secretary of State for Education and Skills set up a high level implementation group as soon as possible to achieve PQA. The Schwartz Group found that the current system, relying on predicted grades, could not be fair. It did not meet the recommended principles of fair admissions, since it is based on data which are not reliable, it is not transparent for applicants or institutions, and may present barriers to applicants who lack self-confidence. (This was taken forward by a DfES-led Group looking at PQA and is now included in the recommendations for Improving the Applications to HE process being taken forward by the HE sector led Delivery Partnership.)
- 1.3. UCAS to extend its **electronic services** to all applicants for 2006 entry. This has the potential to produce a more integrated service for applicants and effect major improvements to the admissions process.
- 1.4. The Schwartz Group noted that **discrepancies between application systems for full-time and part-time study** would make it difficult to implement the Schwartz Report principles for applications for part-time courses. Therefore UCAS, in partnership with UUK, SCOP (now GuildHE), AoC and other relevant bodies, should seek views on the issues involved for part-time applicants and make recommendations to the proposed centre of expertise on admissions.
- 1.5. UCAS and other admissions services review the **design of application forms** in partnership with higher education admissions staff, schools and colleges. This review should specifically consider the provision of summarised information to help admissions staff to assess contextual factors.
- 1.6. Recognition of the **need to move towards greater differentiation [between applicants]** as quickly as possible.
- 1.7. Quality Assurance Agency's **review of Access courses**. Its recommendations relating to consistency of academic standards and description of student achievement are likely to be helpful to admissions staff. Similarly, it welcomes the aim of the QCA led programme on

vocational qualifications to develop a unit-based national system of qualifications and credit.

- 1.8. Additional assessment should be kept to a minimum. National research study to be commissioned from an independent body to assess the **idea of a national test of potential**. The Group recognised that any such test must sit within the new 14-19 framework.
- 1.9. The proposed centre of expertise on admissions should lead an investigation, in partnership with UUK, and GuildHE member institutions, into the scope for **greater co-ordination of common tests**.
- 1.10. Admissions staff and relevant bodies to consider the desirability and feasibility of **common interviews**.
- 1.11. The Schwartz Group also believed there may be scope for a more applicant-centred approach to the many forms related to admissions (for example, for financial aid, health checks, and Criminal Records Bureau checks).
- 1.12. Universities and colleges should review their admissions policies and, together with relevant partners, any special admissions arrangements, with the aim of ensuring equality of opportunity within the legal framework.
- 1.13. HE sector as a whole to **review special admissions arrangements (for example, compact schemes)** with the aim to ensure that there is equality of opportunity across the country for people in similar circumstances to participate in schemes giving preferential treatment or to be considered under special measures.
- 1.14. Universities and colleges should make reasonable efforts to treat **EU, EEA nationals and UK nationals not resident in the UK in ways that are as equivalent as possible to the way in which they treat UK-resident applicants**.
- 1.15. The Group recommended the creation of a **central source of expertise and advice on admissions issues**, to act as a resource for institutions who wish to maintain and enhance excellence in admissions. This has subsequently been taken forward by the establishment of the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) Programme.
- 1.16. **DfES (now DIUS/ DCSF)** should act to ensure that consistent levels of **advice and guidance** are available to all applicants. UCAS' role in coordinating the information, advice and guidance services that it provides to schools and colleges welcomed.
- 1.17. The Schwartz Report supported efforts made by professional bodies in **adult guidance** to ensure an appropriate qualifications framework and appropriate training for their members. It urged them to continue this work and to review it in light of the report.
- 1.18. Where other **professional staffs** (for example, National Health Service staff or teachers) are involved in the admissions, for example in interviews, they should receive appropriate training from the HEI, and receive support and recognition within their own organisations to enable them to carry out this role properly.

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Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme www.spa.ac.uk

Department for Innovation Universities and Skills, www.dius.gov.uk

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