

The following plans for improving the applicant experience of College HE were developed in collaboration with practitioners from over 30 different colleges working in groups at the [SPA conference on 20 June 2014](#) and updated by over 30 different colleges at the [SPA conference on 1 June 2015](#). It is not a definitive list and colleges should consider additional issues, solutions and engagement specific to their unique situation, provision and structure. However, they do provide a helpful starting point for colleges seeking to identify and resolve key issues for their admission to HE. The hyperlinks below can be used to navigate to specific topics, or the document can be read as normal to go through all topics in order.

TO IMPROVE THE APPLICANT EXPERIENCE, WE WILL DEAL WITH THE ISSUE OF...

<u>different avenues of application</u>	<u>the dropout rate between application and interview</u>	<u>UCAS/HEP interface with college MIS</u>	<u>internal progression</u>
<u>staff training for HE admissions staff</u>	<u>working with multiple HEPs</u>	<u>recruiting external students</u>	<u>consumer protection</u>

Different avenues of application

detailing and understanding the issue's many aspects	identifying solutions to those aspects	engaging and collaborating with key people	reviewing and measuring success	additional notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of communication from tutors to admissions staff about internal students for HE progression • Tutors suggesting that students bypass the systems • Tutors only advising FE students about other HEPs and not raising awareness of their own HE provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat internal applicants the same as external applicants • Undertake staff training with tutors on the importance of following systems (especially in light of the QAA Quality Code) • College website should point applicants directly to the right page on UCAS to apply • Market internal progression opportunities to own FE students • Improve understanding of college's HE provision amongst own FE tutors: highlight aspects where some students may prefer such options (e.g. staying local; support; style of teaching and learning; culture); mindful of broader advisory role in the best interests of the student • Consider activities to improve understanding of HE and ease transition from FE to HE study, including: tutor group visits; taster days and taster HE lectures; HE-FE mentors • Examine whether an internal progression bursary would help: reward potential of own students; ease financial worries; promote HE study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutors – including FE tutors • Marketing • Students • Parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of progression • Survey eligible non-progressors 	<p>Applicants who don't use UCAS won't be included in your UCAS data</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants (especially internal students) don't want to use UCAS for financial reasons - particularly for topping-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could consider paying for internal applicants – done by some colleges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of internal applicants 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant details are not completed correctly when not applying via UCAS • Need to handle applications efficiently so decisions can be communicated quickly and consistently across different application routes • Risk of treating international direct applications differently, or of collecting different information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applications to be received by / co-ordinated through admissions administrators rather than tutors - forms checked for completion before handing to tutors • Consider conducting more telephone or Skype interviews. • Review if interviews are always necessary • Use central co-ordination of admissions to assure consistency, manage policy and drive efficiencies • Set targets and senior level agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutors • Heads of Schools and Curriculum Managers • International recruitment • Agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of applicants attending interview • Conversion rates • Data quality • Visa status • KPIs 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing data from Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Timeliness is key 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links with UCAS to download data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner HEPs • MIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversion rates • Speed of decision-making 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues with part-time applications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not following college procedures - Processing of applications being delayed by tutors - Dealing with employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply internal deadlines • Develop monitoring and reporting systems • Apply a central co-ordination of admissions to assure consistency, manage policy and drive efficiencies • Approve decision-making criteria in advance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching staff • Admissions staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports which monitor timescales and turnaround times • Use data trends for information about 'late recruiting' courses and employers 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues with advanced entry: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Matching learning from elsewhere to syllabus - APL mapping - Providing sufficient detail through a standard application, particularly if transferring prior to completing full award 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Define APL policy and publicise it so applicants are aware of what needs to be provided / can identify whether or not they are likely to meet requirements - Use students who gained advanced entry as templates to build matching examples - Use academic expertise from within the college and Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching staff - HEPs - Curriculum Managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progression and success rates of advanced entry students against rest of cohort - Quicker application turnaround times 	

The dropout rate between application and interview

detailing and understanding the issue's many aspects	identifying solutions to those aspects	engaging and collaborating with key people	reviewing and measuring success	additional notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating whether or not to interview. Can we/should we make offers based on the application alone? • How many opportunities do/should we give applicants to attend interview? (Some institutions are reinviting for interview up to three times.) • Using an intermediary agency for distance learning students and quality assurance of the intermediaries • Issues regarding DSA and changes to funding • Fitness to study policy – is this appropriate? Possible? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to SPA's good practice guidance on interviews • Consider changes to interview format/practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group interviews • Conduct interviews at large sixth forms • Make the interview part of something less formal but more important (e.g. HE Experience Day) • Consider the alternatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uploading of work to an online repository (e.g. Dropbox) or other technical solutions • Tighten up the number of days between receipt of application and interviews and offer – tighter admissions policy • Keep 'chain of communication' as short as possible – quick turnaround 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior management - keep informed but not directly involved • Academic staff • Partner HEPs • Marketing • Employers • Student services • Admissions team/ colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversion rates • Retention, achievement and success rates • Student feedback • Attendance at 'keep warm' events 	

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UCAS/HEP interface with college MIS

detailing and understanding the issue's many aspects	identifying solutions to those aspects	engaging and collaborating with key people	reviewing and measuring success	additional notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration capability of the current system • Format and usability of data (manipulation and presentation) from partner HEPs • Support service (IT/MIS) buy-in to HE processes • Good relationships with partners but issues rest with software and usability • Systems don't talk to each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service provider being able to download data • Standard setting of memorandums of understanding • Dedicated resources • Linkage of software packages • Finding workarounds, possibly involving partner, or checking if partner already has a workaround of their own • Timeline/schedule of data submissions to prepare, to enable forward planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service provider support • Networking with other colleges • HEP partner support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of access to data • Benchmarking with partners/meetings with partners • Data corroboration • Less resources needed for data cleansing 	

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Internal Progression

detailing and understanding the issue's many aspects	identifying solutions to those aspects	engaging and collaborating with key people	reviewing and measuring success	additional notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different selection criteria for internal and external applicants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Justify why applicants are (or aren't) a distinct group – supporting equality and WP targets Would need 'fair admission policy' (to satisfy QAA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SPA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would internal progression address dropout issues when students progress elsewhere? (how to get this data?) Any benchmarking data? Date on internal and external for comparison and benchmarking 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tutors have access to more data for internal applicants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> attendance data parent reports detailed module reports student disciplinary history additional learning support (inc. DSA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use central admissions for internal applicants, or for sample Use other member of staff or manager within department for internal applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions staff Managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse conversion data of internal applicants versus that of external applicants Analyse rejection reasons of internal applicants versus external applicants. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applications across college departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement formal reference system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tutors across college Admissions staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better references Quicker decisions for internal applications 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal conflict of 'Russell Group' progression vs. internal progression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and promote internal distinctiveness and strengths Promote more informed choices 	Key influencers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 3 tutors Parents Student advisers/mentors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse what level 3 students progress onto using UCAS apply data. Do they stay within L3 subject area and do you offer that subject at HE? Use data system to accurately record and report on internal progression Undertake a survey to compare first year satisfaction and success of internal level 3 progression vs. progression elsewhere 	

Staff training for HE admissions staff

detailing and understanding the issue's many aspects	identifying solutions to those aspects	engaging and collaborating with key people	reviewing and measuring success	additional notes
<p>Preparation for and management of Confirmation and Clearing whilst other FE procedures are ongoing. Key points and 'clashes' during the admissions cycle.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FE timetable very heavy during the summer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions from UCAS to acknowledgement - HE in FE issues regarding timescales and deadlines - UCAS procedures • Internal staff development • Break down perceptions about HE admissions • Develop systems that can be accessed across college • Develop a contact list of staff availability at key points of the year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPA • UCAS • Admissions staff • Careers staff • Award tutors/course leaders • Reception staff • HEPs • Applicants • Marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved customer service and satisfaction • Quicker turnaround of applications • No breaks in workflow when staff are away • Increase in enrolled students, without follow up needed • Reduction in telephone enquiries • Improved conversion rates 	<p>Identify other key contacts, i.e. within UCAS and within HEP partners</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE applications and other parts of admissions procedures are often handled by one individual • Staff often rely on manual systems and spreadsheets. How can these be accessed if the member(s) of staff responsible is unavailable/away? • Staff unfamiliar with HE are unsure/apprehensive about handling a new area 				
<p>Issues with transfer of records from 'applicant' to 'student'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness / care for accuracy - Problems for smooth student transition and having support, access to facilities, etc. in place - Risk of late identification of 'no shows' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Log applicant and student status for reporting purposes. Ensure systems are updated and consistently use same status terms • Encourage online enrolment • Planning with HE team to bring forward enrolment process • Log a note for each student and train all staff on how they can access this information – a central system so everyone can access it 			

Working with multiple HEPs

detailing and understanding the issue's many aspects	identifying solutions to those aspects	engaging and collaborating with key people	reviewing and measuring success	additional notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication (both external and internal) across HEPs and colleges• Accessing application data for franchised courses• Different applications, admissions and enrolment systems to deal with from multiple HEPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Negotiation with franchise partners over admissions procedures• Secure access to applicant data held by university partners• College to attend open events at university partner• Attend university meetings with other colleges• Identify key contacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HEP admissions staff• HEP partnerships manager• Marketing• Advice and guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved conversion rates• Support put in place earlier• Student enrolment carried out earlier – quicker access to partner HEP resources etc, increased satisfaction on course	

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Recruiting external students

detailing and understanding the issue's many aspects	identifying solutions to those aspects	engaging and collaborating with key people	reviewing and measuring success	additional notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating via marketing that colleges aren't only for 16-18 • Local competitors at Universities offering a broader student experience • Applicant, parent and school perception • Meeting student/employer demand with course offer • Ensuring that grade profiles on UCAS are updated and clear to encourage more applications • How we keep applicants warm, accepting offers • Competitive fees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend UCAS HE conventions • Offer Taster Days and Open Events • Schools liaison staff to cover HE in school visits • Focus on specific selling points (e.g. cheaper, small groups, tutor support) • Identify your target audience (e.g. full-time, part-time, work-based, adult returners) • Use local labour market and competitor information • If possible, promote availability of accommodation - wider market • Use information from students applying to HE to see where they are applying and what for, to develop in-house offer • Use UCAS data to help look at growth areas • Use FE applications, take-up of courses, conversion and performance to inform planning for HE provision, appropriate HE entry requirements and offer strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Managers • Marketing • Alumni • Schools liaison and feeder schools • Careers advisors • Parents and applicants • Current students and their friends • Employers • FE teaching staff • Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) • Current students to find unique selling points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant numbers and conversion rates • Hits on website • Number of enquiries • Attendance at Taster Days and Open Events • Retention and achievement rates • Decline and acceptance surveys • Follow a cohort of students from application through progression and leavers' destinations 	<p>Budgeting constraints</p> <p>Assessing and influencing parents and schools/careers staff</p> <p>Issues with Tier 4 sponsor licence</p> <p>International students. Should colleges place themselves in this market? (Likely to be very small numbers)</p>

Consumer protection

detailing and understanding the issue's many aspects	identifying solutions to those aspects	engaging and collaborating with key people	reviewing and measuring success	additional notes
<p>Course closure / discontinuation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When to cancel and notify applicants • Offering an alternative internally and assisting with finding alternatives elsewhere • Communicating possibility of cancellation / circumstances when a course may be cancelled • Determining when recruitment numbers prove a course is no longer viable • Balancing 'traditional' late recruitment for some courses with timely decisions to cancel - keeping the applicants' best interests in mind • Will senior managers force early cancellations for fear of litigation? (courses folding) • Handling late applications after a course is cancelled • Student experience affected • Impact on ongoing commitments, e.g. year 2; arrangements with employers / placements • Speculative marketing of courses without strong market research, but which may be a great idea • Safeguarding student experience and dynamics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover yourself as far as possible in pre-application information and terms and conditions – be specific concerning possibility of course closure • Be positive, but realistic, on the website – manage expectations • Develop new programmes / enhance content of existing programmes to replace those not recruiting • Adhere to / mirror UCAS deadline dates • Network with partners of neighbour institution – collaborative agreements • Use local market intelligence to develop new courses, including inception/feeder courses • Make courses and course numbers clear and set targets at key milestones (e.g. UCAS deadlines) to inform viability • Consider common / transferable modules where practical, particularly for first year, to maximise suitable alternative offerings • Codify a procedure/policy for cancelling courses, and make sure staff know about it • Write, implement and publicise clear and fair terms and conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy-in from senior management team and Dean/Head of HE • Head of sections • Partner universities • Curriculum Development Managers / tutors • Careers advisers • Employers • Other regional colleges • Applicants • UCAS • CMA • SPA • QAA • Marketing • Teaching staff • IAG staff • Schools • LEPs • Students • Quality staff • Marketing • Student support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of complaints • Successful alternatives found and taken up by applicants • Number/percentage of cancelled courses • Deferrals • Number/percentage of applicants into Clearing • Viability of courses known prior to summer recess • CMA compliance 	<p>Reliable course planning</p> <p>Using UCAS data reports over last 3 years</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide applicants with disclaimer and terms and conditions (in a 'durable medium') at appropriate stage of the cycle, i.e. offer • Scrutinise historic recruitment patterns – does a course recruit late? If so, set realistic milestones to give course longer to recruit, or push marketing to drive conversion earlier • Robust validation process and check points in admissions cycle • Better market research • Targeted marketing activity and budget focus • Employer engagement • Transparent communication of dates and numbers for decision on viability • Alternative options for infill, contingency plans – own and partners • Quality decision making panel • Promote 24+ loans 			
<p>Publicising information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring all public information is accurate and up to date: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Website - Prospectus - Partner university(ies) website and prospectus - UCAS - Handbooks/programme specifications • Additional public information requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Terms and conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual audit of information – cross checking all the identified sources to ensure they say the same thing • Public information sign off session involving senior HE marketing managers and heads of faculty – annual session to check accuracy of entry requirements etc. • SPA / Community of Practice to consider developing resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing • Web team • Admissions staff • Marketing and admissions staff at partner universities • OIA/CMA staff/guidance • College HE support and curriculum staff • Student advisers • Tutors • Alumni • Student reps • Finance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved conversion rates as decisions are more informed • Improved retention and success rates 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complaints policy - Admissions policy - QAA Quality Code compliance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The support advertised can sometimes be very vague. Could this lead to creating expectations from students that are not met, leading to complaints? • Risk of 'old' information still being publicised (e.g. one year new students were given iPads, the following year they were not, the year after they were given tablets: old posters/flyers may have still been in circulation in the intervening year and may have been mentioned verbally at events, so students complained) • Complaints procedures to be tweaked – FE vs HE (OIA covers students, not applicants) • Consumer protection law potentially applying to FE and postgraduate students 	<p>on model terms and conditions e.g. a template/checklist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All relevant policies and procedures made publicly available • Monitoring and regular auditing of website information • Cascading information to relevant staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure college has a clear disclaimer detailing the duration / time limits to any offers, incentives, support arrangements or financial aid and that the conditions under which any such offers may be withdrawn are specific • Ensure budgets for marketing, recruitment and admissions are set well in advance of offers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review complaints and appeals policies / procedures • Refer to SPA's good practice guidance on complaints and appeals • Check HE partners' procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review other course offerings and consider where consumer protection compliance adopted for undergraduate could be readily adapted in those areas • Maintain a watch / check for updates from CMA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Management Team 		
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<p>Terms and conditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying what terms and conditions are and what should be included • Knowing when to send out terms and conditions and how to send out, i.e. not just web links • How do applicants accept terms and conditions and read, or sign and send back? • Responsibilities between college and partners • Managing changing circumstances after offers accepted e.g. offer letter, inclusion of some sort of caveat? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the learner agreement looking at guidelines from CMA for students • Check what is in UCAS offer letter • Look at student declaration on UCAS application • Look at adding (link to) terms and conditions to Course Collect in addition to sending out pdfs. • Talk to university partners • Review all previous contracts • Agree roles and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum staff • Senior managers • Governors • Quality • Partnership colleges and universities • CMA • UCAS • Legal advice • Customer service • Admissions – front line staff • Marketing • Finance staff • Employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of complaints • Increased questions asked • Reviewing other organisations' examples • No legal action • Good tracking using CRM systems • Once they have accepted confirming of terms and conditions? 	<p>Do applicants have to sign? What happens if you send terms and conditions and the applicants claim not to have received it?</p>
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