



## SPA briefing

### Equal consideration deadlines for applying to higher education

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A deadline for applications, before which equal consideration is guaranteed, is a mechanism for managing applications in a timely manner for consideration. It does not prevent applications from being considered before that deadline; it merely ensures no application received within that period will be rejected purely on the grounds it was received after others in that period. The application deadline sets expectations for all parties involved in applying to, advising on and selecting for entry into higher education (HE).

Equal consideration timelines are critical to achieving the aim cited in the [Schwartz Report](#) of, "Equal consideration for all individuals, regardless of background, to gain admission to a course suited to their ability and aspirations." It forms part of the UCAS principles of admissions in its application and recruitment policy, adherence to which is a condition of being a provider in the UCAS scheme: "Providers must consider all applications for each course on an equal basis if they are received on or before the relevant deadline (15 October, 15 January, and 24 March)."

A set deadline, before which applicants are guaranteed an equal opportunity to be considered against the same selection criteria (academic and non-academic) as all others who apply within that time, provides assurance that admission is not granted on a first-come-first-served basis. This permits all applicants the confidence to spend appropriate time preparing their application and allowing referees time to adequately reflect on the individual aptitude and merits for the courses chosen. It mitigates any advantage gained from having highly-prepared advisers and affords more time for an applicant to self-analyse the range of application support information available from HE providers and from UCAS.

Given the distinct benefit of an equal consideration timeline to supporting fair admissions, SPA recommends all entry routes, not just those through UCAS, employ such timelines to guarantee equal consideration, and clearly publish them online and in other application materials.

SPA would be interested in any developments within individual HE providers on equal consideration deadlines, and would be happy to advise on any considerations or proposals. Please feel free to contact us with any queries – [enquiries@spa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@spa.ac.uk).

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