

Supporting Professionalism in Admissions

The Applicant Experience

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Pip Gilroy, SPA Admissions Support and Development Advisor

What is SPA and what do we do?

- Set up in 2006 following the Schwartz Report *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice* 2004
- “ *The Group recommends the creation of **a central source of expertise and advice on admissions issues**. Its purpose would be to act as a **resource for institutions** who wish to maintain and enhance excellence in admissions. Such a centre could **lead the continuing development of fair admissions**, evaluating and commissioning research, and **spreading best practice**. ”*
- SPA is an independent and objective Programme, funded by HEFCE, HEFCW, DELNI, SFC, UCAS and Universities UK

What is SPA and what do we do?

SPA promotes fair admissions and access to higher education in the UK by developing and leading on good practice in the recruitment and selection of students.

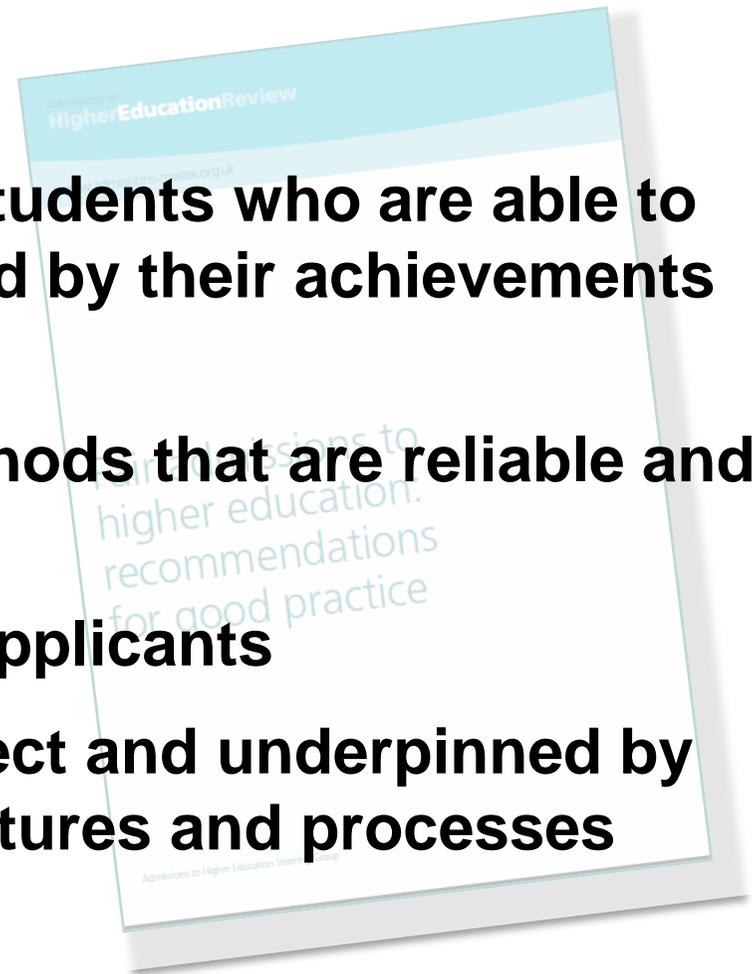
- Expert shared resource for HE sector on fair admissions
- Independent, impartial, evidenced based good practice
- Information broker between makers and implementers of policy
- Small team, but with strategic, practical and relevant experience
- We work closely with HEPs and FECs and other stakeholders such as UUK, GuildHE, UCAS, funding councils, OFFA, QAA etc.

What is SPA and what do we do to support fair access?

- **National strategy for access and student success** – SPA talking with HEFCE and OFFA particularly on contextualised admissions.
- Roll out of **HEAT** (HE Access Tracker) in England, provides data, systems and information to underpin widening participation practice and reporting. A collaborative approach.
- SPA working with HE providers in **Scotland** on an SFC funded project on contextualised admissions
- **Wales** - improve access to information on school data ('My Local school' website launched) and community data to HE providers
- **Northern Ireland** - SPA on Measuring and Targeting Disadvantage working group

What is Fair Admissions?

1. be transparent
2. enable institutions to select students who are able to complete the course as judged by their achievements and their potential
3. strive to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid
4. seek to minimise barriers to applicants
5. be professional in every respect and underpinned by appropriate institutional structures and processes



Why is a good applicant experience important?

- It is a part of the student experience:

A student's experience of university does not begin at the moment they step onto campus at the beginning of October ... The early relationship between student and university is important during the applications and admissions process, in preparing students for university life, and to initiate their engagement with and attitudes towards their university in the best way possible. A student's experience of university can stretch back even further through effective HE engagement with schools and colleges.

— Enhancing the Student Experience, 1994 Group (2007)

Why is a good applicant experience important?

A good applicant experience

... is mutually beneficial to the applicant and the HEP

... prepares, informs and provides equality of opportunity

... accurately matches

... improves student retention and enhances the HEP's strategic mission

A poor applicant experience

... is inherently detrimental – both lose out

... perpetuates barriers and disengages applicants/advisors

... risks incongruence

... leads to unfulfilled potential and increased drop-out

What is the applicant experience?



The 'application funnel'

recruitment

admissions

enrolment

Who's hiding in the funnel?



School/college liaison

WP/outreach

Marketing

Admissions

Planning

Teaching & learning

Student services

Student records

What is the applicant experience?



- Covers all activities prior to commencing an application
- Some individuals in this stage will never become HE applicants
- Early engagement activities ... but how early do we start?
- Preparatory engagement with prospective applicants
- Supplying the application process with applicants that are well matched to the HE provider

What is the applicant experience?



- Covers everything from when an applicant commits to beginning an application to when it is considered by the HE provider(s)
- May be only a matter of hours or a more prolonged period of contemplation, drafting and consultation with advisors
- For some applicants, the first direct engagement with the provider
- Not just an administrative process – this is a critical connecting point in the applicant experience

What is the applicant experience?



- Adopting a behavioural view of ‘experience’
 - Applicants are not passive passengers
 - HE providers are more than just destinations
- Linked and underpinned by effective, quality interactions

informing

advising

guiding

Benefits of the applicant experience

- Strategic leadership in admissions is integral to learning and teaching strategy, management and planning
- The applicant experience strategy underpins the student experience, and supports the management and processes of both academic and professional staff, leading to:
 - more integrated ways of working, with possible efficiency gains
 - enhanced staff professionalism and understanding of strategy
 - high quality practices and procedures that may give competitive advantage, enhance reputation and aid retention
 - ability to take advantage of external changes quickly

... and the benefits for the applicants

- Better understanding of what HE entails for all potential applicants, and the growth of cultural capital for low participation groups
- Better understanding of the available options, leading to...
- Well informed decision-making, reducing risk of dissatisfaction or withdrawal
- Better preparedness for HE:

academically

socially

emotionally

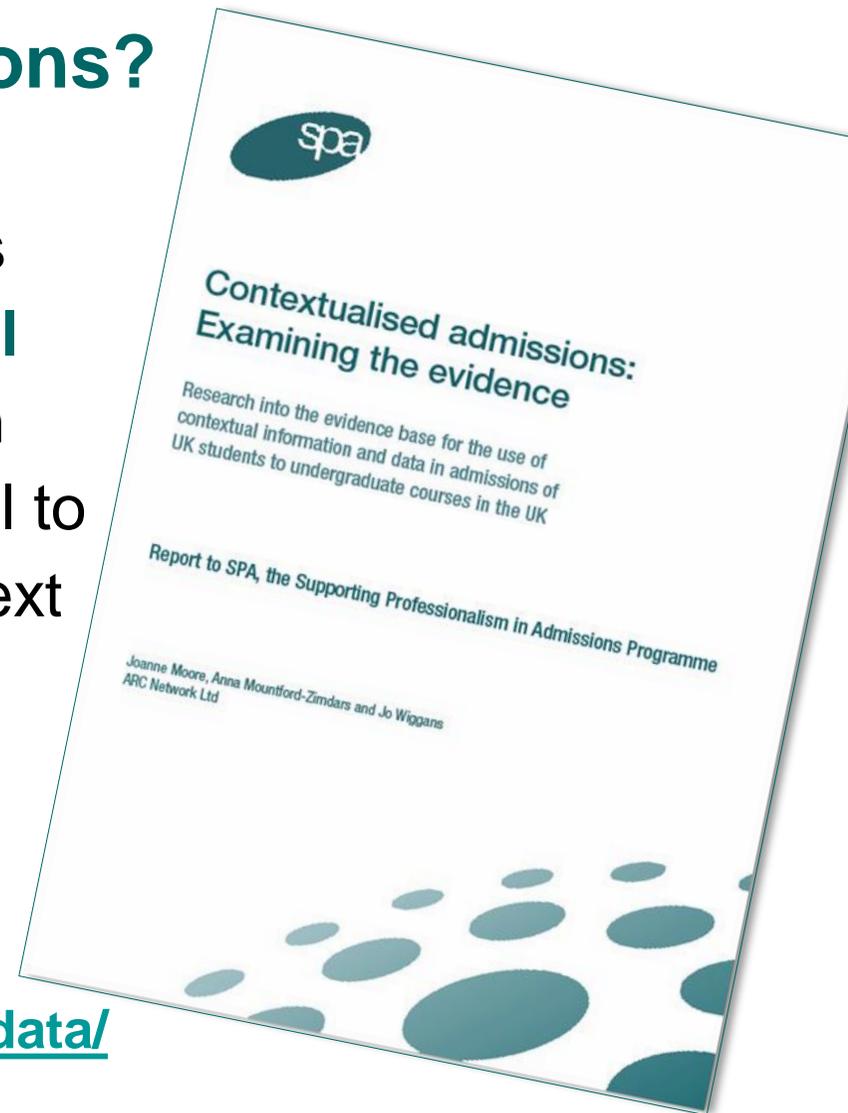
higher rates of completion and student success

What is contextualised admissions?

Contextualised admissions is defined as **contextual information** and **contextual data** used by HE providers to assess an applicant's prior attainment and potential to succeed in higher education in the context of the circumstances in which their attainment has been obtained.

SPAs Evidence Report:

<http://www.spa.ac.uk/information/contextualdata/spasworkoncontextual/cdresearch2013/>



Contextualised admissions

- Some data is self-declared as part of the application (e.g. disability or involvement in WP activities);
- other data may be from publicly available data sets e.g. postcode links to young participation in HE rates by neighbourhood (Polar 2 & Polar 3) from HEFCE or linked to applicant via UCAS contextual data service

Contextual Data

Educational and socio-economic background
From data fields in applications via UCAS or other sources (eg DfE)

Contextual Information

Through assessment of info about applicant circumstances e.g. personal statement, reference

Outreach Participation

Through activity participation e.g. compacts, summer schools, where targeting occurs prior to application to HE stage

Contextualised admissions and holistic assessment

Contextual Information and Data

- ❑ Pre-Application information from outreach/WP
- ❑ Historic institution data trends and analysis
- ❑ External data matched to the applicant
- ❑ Background information submitted in the application

Original Application Data

Qualifications

Personal statement

Reference

Test results taken pre-application

Other

Holistic Assessment

Initial Assessment

Offer Making

Final Decision

Student Support

How is contextual data and information used within admissions and access?

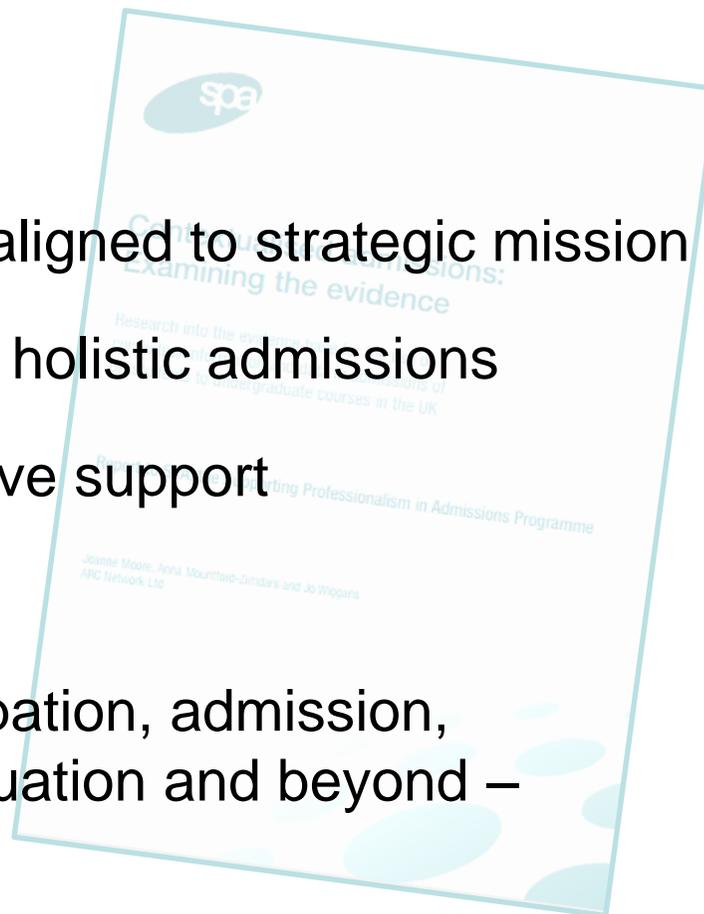
- for widening participation – to target aspiration raising and WP and fair access activities
- to inform the decision as to who to interview
- to inform admissions decision making to enable the “best students” to be admitted and retained (as defined by the HEI)
- to identify applicants who may need additional learner support or practical advice during their application process, transition or when registered as a student
- to help assess applicants for financial/ in-kind support
- for statistical and qualitative monitoring and reporting purposes.

Linking the use of contextual data to the Applicant Experience

- Highlights the importance of collaborative relationships between pre-application and application stages
- Admissions staff using contextual data in decision making should be aware of the issues. Internal communications, professional development and training
- Applicants needing additional learner support or practical advice should receive appropriate transition and in-session learner support to ensure their potential continues to be developed.
- Individual institutions are autonomous in the use of data and how it is used within their admissions decision-making process.

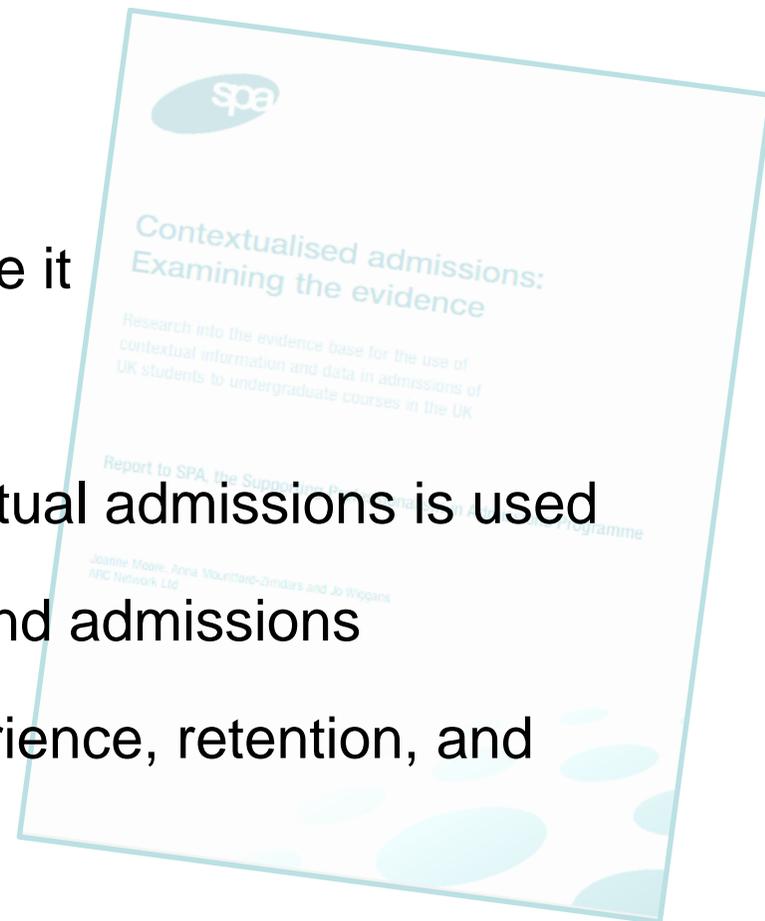
From the report to practice:

- Use of contextual data and information aligned to strategic mission
- Contextual data **can** be a helpful part of holistic admissions
- Senior management buy-in and pro-active support
- Good record keeping:
 - Linked systems for widening participation, admission, planning, student progression, graduation and beyond – student lifecycle
 - Create / use the HE providers own ‘baseline’ evidence base



From the report to practice:

- Know what data is out there and how to use it
 - Appropriately trained staff
- Transparency about how and when contextual admissions is used
- Integrated approach to outreach, access and admissions
 - and ideally to support the student experience, retention, and graduation



‘Access without support is not opportunity’



Thank you
Your feedback is welcomed

More information from: enquiries@spa.ac.uk or 01242 544891
www.spa.ac.uk