CALL FOR EVIDENCE

UNIVERSITIES UK REVIEW OF FAIR ADMISSIONS

STAFF AT UK HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS

Please use this document to help prepare your responses before submitting online at:

https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Pages/fair-admissions-review.aspx

PAGE ONE: ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey, conducted by Universities UK.

We are seeking your views about the fairness of undergraduate admissions in UK higher education.

This survey, which is for staff at all UK higher education providers, includes questions about:

- the key issues and challenges relating to transparency and fairness in admissions
- the strengths and weakness of recruitment and admissions practices from the applicant perspective

Please do include examples of your own provider's practices as part of your response.

The information gathered in this survey will inform Universities UK's evidence base for its Fair Admissions Review. Please note that all responses will remain confidential and findings will only be presented at an aggregated level. The Universities UK privacy notice can be found on our website.

The deadline for responses is Monday 9 December 2019. The survey should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions, please contact us on +44 (0)20 7419 4111 or daniel.wake@universitiesuk.ac.uk.
PAGE TWO: RESPONDENT DETAILS

1. Please enter the name of your higher education provider:

2. Please select the location of your higher education provider:
   - □ England
   - □ Northern Ireland
   - □ Scotland
   - □ Wales

3. Please enter your job title:

4. Please enter your email address:
In June 2003, an independent steering group reviewed the options that English higher education institutions should consider when assessing the merit of applicants for their courses. The group was also asked to report on the high level principles underlying these options. The steering group, chaired by Professor Steven Schwartz, published a report in September 2004 on its findings, which included a set of five principles for the basis of fair admissions:

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

Further reviews have followed, including developments in Scotland where, in 2016, the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) published a report called ‘A blueprint for fairness’, which included recommendations for universities relating to areas such as transparent admissions policies, delivering a coordinated approach to access and basing entry requirements on a strong educational rationale, and included challenging targets on access. The higher education sector responded through Universities Scotland's 'Working to widen access' report, which had actions on admissions, articulation and bridging programmes.

However, the focus of this survey relates to principles outlined in the Schwartz report. While the report's terms of reference were focused on English institutions, it included over-arching principles that could be adopted by all UK higher education providers. With this in mind, we recognise the distinction of admissions systems across the UK nations and encourage all providers to respond in the context of their own admissions processes and policies.
The Schwartz report recommended that universities and colleges should provide, consistently and efficiently through appropriate mechanisms, the information applicants need to make informed choices. With this in mind:

5. What key information do applicants need in order to make informed choices about higher education during the different stages of the admissions process (pre-application, application, post application, and transition to higher education)?

Notes:
- **Pre-application stage:** This covers an individual’s consideration of higher education study, including all pre-application activities and interactions with a higher education provider prior to starting a course of study.
- **Application stage:** This covers activities from the point a prospective student decides to complete an application to university up to the point where the application is considered by the institution(s) applied to.
- **Post-application stage:** This covers activities surrounding an institution’s consideration of an applicant’s submitted application, from the point the application is submitted to when an applicant has been confirmed, or guaranteed, a place of study.
- **Transition to higher education:** This covers post-confirmation activities, from the point an applicant’s place has been confirmed through to (and potentially beyond) the commencement of higher education studies.

6. How does your provider ensure that applicants have access to the right information, at the right times, in order for them to make informed choices?

7. On balance, how transparent are the ways that higher education providers use applicants’ qualifications and experience to assess potential?

- ☐ Very transparent
- ☐ Fairly transparent
- ☐ Not very transparent
- ☐ Not at all transparent
- ☐ Unsure

Please explain your answer:
PAGE FIVE: ASSESSING APPLICANTS

The Schwartz report recommended that the ability of an applicant to complete a course must be an essential criterion for admission. In assessing applicants' merit and potential, institutions may legitimately consider other factors in addition to examination results, including: the educational context of an applicant's formal achievement; other indicators of potential and capability; and how an individual applicant's experiences, skills and perspectives could contribute to the learning environment. With this in mind:

8. What types of information do higher education providers need in order to fairly assess an applicant's potential to succeed on a course?

9. To what extent does the use of personal statements to assess applicants support fairness in admissions?

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Very little
- Not at all
- Unsure

Please explain your answer:
PAGE SIX: SUPPORTING APPLICANTS

The Schwartz report recommended that admissions processes should seek to minimise any barriers that are irrelevant to satisfying admissions requirements. This could include barriers arising from the means of assessment; the varying resources and support available to applicants; disability; and the type of an applicant's qualifications (e.g. vocational or academic). With this in mind:

10. What are the key admissions challenges for the following applicant groups, and how do / can higher education providers best support them?

a) Part-time applicants

b) Mature applicants

c) Disabled applicants

d) Estranged students

e) Applicants applying through non-traditional routes
PAGE SEVEN: OFFER-MAKING

The Schwartz report recommended that admissions policies and procedures should be informed and guided by current research and good practice. The report adds that criteria should not include factors irrelevant to the assessment of merit. With this in mind:

11. Please outline the key strengths or weaknesses of using the following offer types, and where there might be room for improvement to promote greater fairness and transparency for applicants:

   a) Contextual offers

   b) Unconditional offers

   c) Conditional unconditional offers

12. In which ways can higher education providers’ use of incentives support fairness and transparency for applicants? Are there any ways in which incentives would not support fairness and transparency?
PAGE EIGHT: PROCESSES

The Schwartz report recommended that universities and colleges should monitor and evaluate the link between their admissions policies and undergraduate performance and retention, and review their policies to address any issues identified. The report also outlined that a fair admissions system should strive to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid. With this in mind:

13. How might higher education providers best monitor and evaluate the impact of their admissions processes on applicants?

14. To what extent do the processes of Clearing and Adjustment support fairness in admissions?
   - [ ] To a great extent
   - [ ] To some extent
   - [ ] Very little
   - [ ] Not at all
   - [ ] Unsure

Please explain your answer.
PAGE NINE: SYSTEMS

Some parts of the admissions system operate differently in different UK nations.

What would be the relative advantages and disadvantages for applicants, providers and schools of the following features of an admissions system?

15. **System A: Pre-qualifications offer-making (available in current system)**, whereby the higher education provider can make offers to applicants before they have achieved their qualifications. Under this system, applicants may apply, receive offers and have their places accepted before receiving their qualifications.

16. **System B: Post-qualifications confirmation (available in current system)**, whereby the higher education provider confirms all applicant places after they have achieved their qualifications. Under this system, some applicants may apply and receive offers before achieving their qualifications, but their place will not be confirmed until they have achieved their qualifications.

17. **System C: Post-qualifications offer-making**, whereby the higher education provider only makes offers to applicants after they have achieved their qualifications. Under this system, some applicants may apply before achieving their qualifications, but will not receive an offer until they have achieved their qualifications.

18. **System D: Post-qualification applications**, whereby applicants apply after they have achieved their course entry requirements. Under this system, applicants cannot apply until they have met the conditions of the course.

19. Other systems, including combinations of the above (please outline).

20. On balance, which of the above features might best operate in the interests of fairness and transparency for applicants while guaranteeing an efficient and effective admissions process? (Tick all that apply).

- System A: Pre-qualifications offer-making
- System B: Post-qualifications confirmation
- System C: Post-qualifications offer-making
- System D: Post-qualifications applications
- Other systems, including combinations of the above (please outline)
- Unsure

Please explain your answer.
PAGE TEN: PRINCIPLES

Based on your responses and experiences, please suggest whether each Schwartz report principle is still valid or needs to be amended:

21. Principle one: A fair admissions system should be transparent.
   □ Still valid
   □ Needs to be amended
   □ Unsure
   Please explain your answer.

22. Principle two: A fair admissions system should enable institutions to select students who are able to complete the course as judged by their achievements and their potential.
   □ Still valid
   □ Needs to be amended
   □ Unsure
   Please explain your answer.

23. Principle three: A fair admissions system should strive to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid.
   □ Still valid
   □ Needs to be amended
   □ Unsure
   Please explain your answer.

24. Principle four: A fair admissions should seek to minimise barriers for applicants.
   □ Still valid
   □ Needs to be amended
   □ Unsure
   Please explain your answer.
25. Principle five: A fair admissions system should be professional in every respect and underpinned by appropriate institutional structures and processes.

☐ Still valid
☐ Needs to be amended
☐ Unsure

Please explain your answer.

26. Are there any other principles that should be considered?