

## CASE STUDY INTRODUCTION

Admission to university and higher education courses is often considered to be complex and somewhat shrouded in mystery. However over a number of years, the higher education sector has been committed to making the process more transparent and a number of initiatives have taken place. The Delivery Partnership for Admissions Reform, based at Universities UK and Guild HE, is one such initiative, where key stakeholders with an interest in admissions to higher education (universities, colleges, schools, government departments, the Universities and Colleges Applications Service (UCAS)) have worked together to make a number of changes, including provision of additional information to applicants and their advisors, and amendments to the national admissions process operated through UCAS.

Almost 50,000 higher education courses are provided by many universities and colleges in the UK, and there are 309 institutions currently members of UCAS. Universities and colleges are very different in size, range of courses on offer, and how selective they are ie how difficult it is to gain a place on their courses. Stories in the press tend to focus on the very selective, research intensive universities, but they comprise only part of the sector. Even the most prestigious institutions will have some courses which are easier to get a place on than others, and that others that might be considered to be easier to enter will have courses which are over-subscribed.

### **How difficult is it to get into higher education?**

The following statistics have been provided by UCAS, relating to applications to university in 2008 from applicants from the UK. They help to show the scale of how difficult or easy it is to get a place on a course. For 2008 entry over 500,000 people applied for a place on a higher education course using the UCAS service, making nearly 2 million applications. Each applicant may apply for up to 5 courses, and so it could be said, in very general terms that courses which receive fewer than five applications per place are unselective. In reality there are a few programmes which are very specialised, and which receive small numbers of applications per place from highly qualified applicants, and therefore which need to apply very robust selection criteria and processes. This table shows that most programmes, over two-thirds, are relatively unselective in terms of numbers of applications received, and that that 46% of applicants apply for these courses. The large number of programmes showing no acceptances are accounted for by the very many programmes which combine subjects and which might not receive any, or will have too few, applications to run in a particular year. At the other end of the scale a very small number of programmes attract more than 25 applications per place and could therefore be said to be very selective.

Number of applications received for each accepted place	Number of programmes	Percentage of all programmes (including programmes that did not accept anyone)	Percentage of all programmes (excluding programmes that did not accept anyone)	Number of applications of all types (main scheme, EXTRA, clearing and RPA)*	Percentage of all applications
>=25	226	0.6%	0.8%	42937	2.2%
>15 to 24	678	1.7%	2.3%	65433	3.3%
>10 to 15	1601	4.0%	5.5%	172522	8.8%
>5 to 10	7124	17.6%	24.7%	731499	37.4%
<=5	19238	47.5%	66.6%	897066	45.9%
No accepts	11652	28.8%		46482	2.4%

Data from UCAS: relates to 2008 entry, data as at end-of-year 14 November 2008

\*see UCAS website for information on what these are.

However, another measure of the competition for places is the percentage of applicants receiving an offer of a place. The case studies which follow show the percentage of applicants receiving an offer for that particular programme. In the case studies this ranges from 13% to 68%.

### **Are these case studies true of all programmes?**

Although each institution follows a common process through UCAS, the decisions that they make and how they make them is their own responsibility, and this autonomy over admissions decisions is protected in law. It would be impossible to provide a complete description of how all decisions are made, therefore these case studies are intended to provide a snapshot to help illustrate how universities and colleges make decisions on applications to their courses. The case studies do not include detailed information on interview or admissions test processes, but more information on these can be found on the UCAS and Supporting Professionalism in Admissions websites.

### **How do the institutions ensure that all applications are considered fairly?**

The UCAS scheme has a number of rules and principles designed to ensure fairness, and which higher education institutions are obliged to follow. The UCAS scheme has a number of key dates within it, by which time certain things have to be done, either by the institution or the applicant. One of these is the deadline date by which all applications received by that date must receive **equal consideration**. This '**principle of equal consideration**' ensures that all applications received by an institution by a particular date are judged according to the same criteria. For some universities and courses (Oxford, Cambridge, Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science) this date is 15 October. For the remainder it is 15 January. However in practice, most courses are happy to consider applications

after 15 January and will apply the same criteria to assess applications throughout the year. The general rule is that the more applications a programme receives, the more likely it is to observe the equal consideration date, and either do not consider applications received after that date at all, or perhaps consider them in a different way.

### **What information do the case studies provide?**

#### **A. Information about the type of institution, programme of study and entry qualifications and level of competition for places:**

1. A brief description of type of Higher Education institution eg. A small research intensive university; a large university founded after 1992; an art and design college.
2. Programme of Study
3. Total number of applications received
4. How many places are available
5. A ratio to show how many applications are received per place
6. Whether applicants are invited for an interview
7. How many offers are made
8. The Percentage of offers made to applicants:
9. Standard offers made (in terms of A-levels, and/or Scottish qualifications where appropriate)
10. The range of A-level grades/Scottish achievement or average tariff score held by applicants who were accepted on to the programme.
11. The proportion applicants accepted with qualifications other than A-level.

#### **B. The selection process**

1. Are the decisions made in a **central** administrative office, or **devolved** to an academic department?
2. Are applicants required to take an additional admissions test?
3. Where interviews or auditions are held, when are these held?
4. What **equal consideration date**: ie. 15 October or 15 January applies to this programme?
5. What is the policy on considering applications after this date: ie how do you treat applications received after 15 Jan?
6. Admissions policy setting process: How and when the admissions policy and entry criteria for this course is agreed.
7. A description of the admissions criteria for the programme as described in UCAS entry profile – academic and non-academic.
8. How the admissions criteria are applied ie what process the person considering a form goes through.

#### **C. Examples**

A few examples of real applicants to this programme, to show how the admissions process worked for them.

We hope that you have found these case studies helpful. Further information on the UCAS scheme and how it operates can be found at:

UCAS: [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

The Supporting Professionalism in Admissions website: [www.spa.ac.uk](http://www.spa.ac.uk)

Further information on the work of the Delivery Partnership can be found at:

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/AboutUs/AssociatedOrganisations/Partnerships/Pages/AdmissionsDeliveryPartnership.aspx>