



Supporting Professionalism
in Admissions

SPA National Expert Think Tank

Fair admissions in a
competitive environment

A process to ensure fair admissions
in additional admissions
assessments

June 2016

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SPA National Expert Think Tanks

National Expert Think Tanks (NETTs) are expert groups convened by SPA to inform and influence topical national debates on fairness and good practice in higher education (HE) admissions. In 2015-16, the NETT considered how fair admissions can be maintained and enhanced in the current HE landscape, how fair admissions is understood across the sector in the UK, and what it means to individual HE providers. The aim of the NETT was to support HE providers in addressing these issues in the more competitive and resource-stretched higher education landscape.

Introduction

Each higher education provider (HEP) will have its own approach to the use of additional admissions assessments that relate to their individual needs, whether they are to support widening participation or to act as a method for more specialist selection. This guidance has been developed to explore the use of additional admissions assessments and provide a framework for selecting (or not selecting) to use them as part of a fair admissions process. It draws on the findings from a recent research study conducted by members of the 2016 Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) National Expert Think Tank (NETT) on fair admissions.

This work also builds on existing materials produced by SPA, such as the [SPA good practice in interviewing applicants for admission to HE](#), and [SPA's criteria for what makes a good admissions test](#).

The work here can be used across an undergraduate and postgraduate audience.

Research findings

Five higher education providers (HEPs) participated in focus group discussions:

- Arts University Bournemouth
- Bournemouth University
- Southampton Solent University
- University of the West of England (UWE, Bristol)
- University of Sheffield

The purpose of the focus group discussions were to identify the reasons for utilising additional admissions assessments in the admissions process, the types of assessments used, as well as the degree to which these uphold the principles of fair admissions advocated by SPA¹. Data was collected using standardised focus group prompts and collated into a standardised data response sheet (developed by Bournemouth University), thus ensuring consistency of process across the differing data collection sites. The data obtained was then analysed, looking for similarities, trends and differences between the HEPs.

The findings from the focus group discussions were used to form the basis of two online questionnaires (developed by Southampton Solent University, Bournemouth University, and SPA). One of the questionnaires was developed for schools and colleges and the other for higher education providers. These were distributed via the SPA National Expert Think Tank. Due to time constraints, these questionnaires had a limited response time, however, the questionnaire was completed by 68 HEPs and 20 schools and colleges.

Of the HEP responses:

- The largest group of participants were Academic (other) staff 39.7% (n=27)

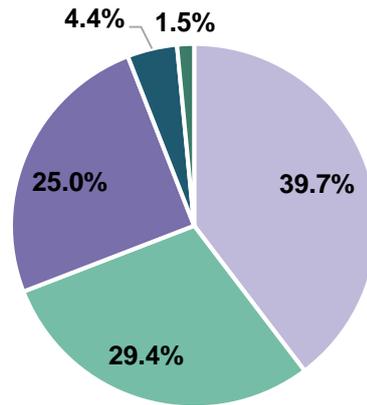
Followed by:

- Professional Services 29.4% (n=20)
- Academic (Admissions Tutors) 25% (n=17)
- Others 4.4% (n=3)
- Professional Services (other) 1.5% (n=1)

Of these respondents, 83.8% (n=57) were directly involved in admission assessments.

¹ <https://www.spa.ac.uk/resources/what-fair-admissions>

HE provider respondents



- Academic (other)
- Professional Services
- Academic (Admissions Tutors)
- Others
- Professional Services (other)

The participants in the school/colleges questionnaire were:

- Professional school/college support staff (n=8)
- HE application coordinator (n=6)
- Teacher/Tutor (n=3)
- Other (n=2)
- Referees (n=1)

Of these, 18 (90%) of the respondents were directly involved in providing advice to applicants in their university applications.

Reasons for using additional admissions assessments

The survey found reasons for using additional admissions assessments were numerous. They included:

- The requirement for a specific skill-set (e.g. numeracy, artistic ability etc.)
- A mechanism for managing student numbers on programmes where the number of applications significantly outweigh the places available
- Enabling a more thorough assessment of candidates' ability beyond that presented by the attainment, subjects studied or personal statement.

These reasons may support the principles of fair admissions, specifically principle 2 (...**select students who are able to complete the course, as judged by their achievements and their potential**) and 4 (**seek to minimise barriers for applicants**, that is, by enabling a more holistic assessment of the candidate beyond a simple focus on attainment). Interestingly, using additional admissions assessments was also seen as an opportunity to open dialogue with candidates in order to explore the degree to which the programme was the right choice for them, as well as enabling the candidates to develop a better understanding of the demands of the course. Staff also highlighted the role the admissions process plays in allowing HEPs to admit students who are likely to succeed, rather than putting students in a position where they risk not meeting their potential, or are 'set up to fail'.

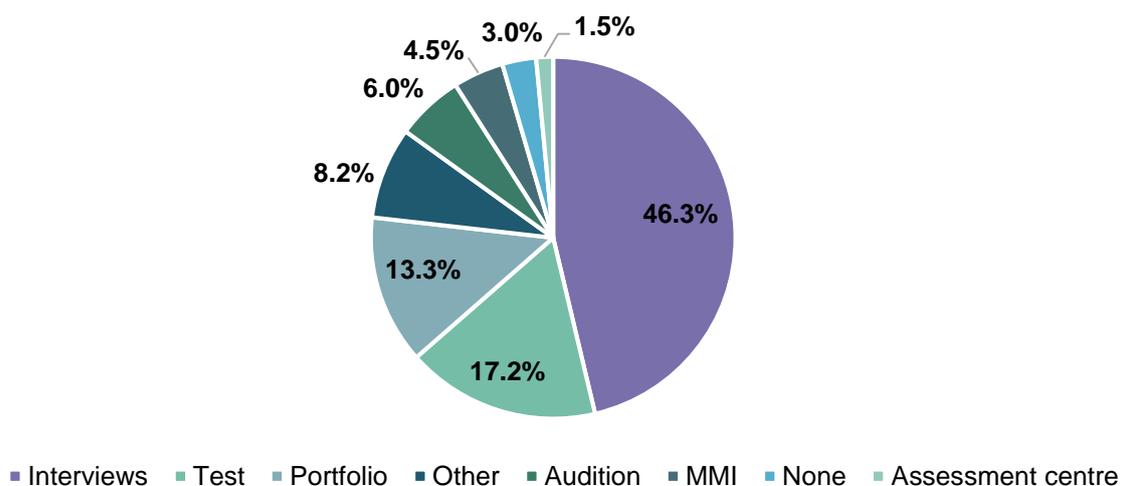
In examining the HEP questionnaire data it was apparent that the reasons for using additional assessments was multi-faceted, with 'other' receiving the largest amount of votes (n=28), followed by specific professional body requirements (n=22), then specialist requirements as part of specialist programme (n=12). Only 6 participants identified it as a means of rationalising the high number of applications. This is in contrast with the views of schools and colleges. When asked which programmes use additional admissions assessments, a common response from these groups was for highly selective programmes ("Oxbridge"), as well as professional NHS courses (nursing, social work, medicine), and to a smaller degree the performance related courses. This difference in perceptions from HEPs and schools and colleges might suggest a lack of transparency, or poor communication, from the HEP regarding why additional assessments are used. This in turn may make it difficult for schools and colleges to support candidates in understanding and fulfilling the criteria they are being assessed against.

Types of additional assessment

A plethora of different additional assessments were identified during the focus group discussions including: portfolios, group activities, English and Maths tests, group interviews, one-to-one interviews, multiple mini interviews, auditions, and drawing tasks. From the HEP questionnaire data it appears as though the predominate additional admissions assessments used were:

- Interviews (46.3% n=62)
- Test (17.2% n=23)
- Portfolio (13.3% n=18)
- Other (8.2% n=11)
- Audition (6% n=8)
- Multi mini interviews (4.5% n=6)
- None (3% n=4)
- Assessment centre (1.5% n=2)

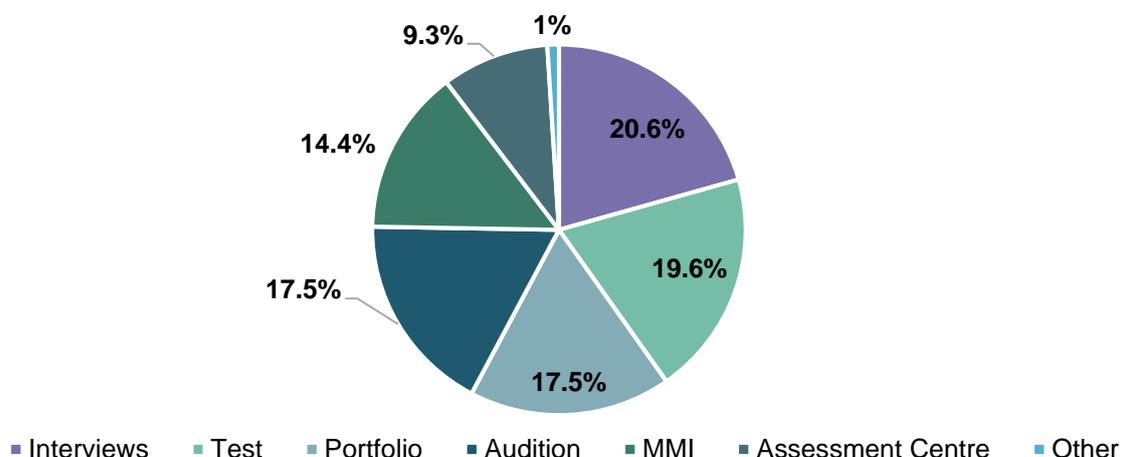
Assessment type: HE providers responses



However, when this question was asked to schools and colleges there appears to be a much more even picture of interviews (20.6% n=20), followed by test (19.6% n=19), portfolio (17.5% n=17), audition (17.5% n=17), multi mini interviews (14.4% n=14), assessment centre (9.3% n=9), and then other (1% n=1). The differences in responses may suggest schools and colleges have a broad overview of the

types of assessments used, but could benefit from further engagement from HEPs in order to more effectively support the candidates they advise.

Assessment type: School/college responses



Assessment and parity

From reviewing the data from the focus group discussions it appears as though some additional assessments are assessed using a scoring sheet or grid. These assessments are conducted independently between assessors and the findings shared. In doing this it ensures both **transparency** (principle 1), **using assessment methods that are reliable and valid** (principle 3).

Having a clear and transparent scoring/recording grid that is marked by each interviewer independently of the other enables parity in the assessment process as staff are marking to a criteria, rather than relying on subjective judgements which could be different between staff members. It also enables HEPs to audit their admission assessments by reviewing scoring charts of individual members, identifying if candidates are more/less likely to be rejected or accepted by certain members of staff.

Two of the institutions (Bournemouth University and UWE, Bristol) included service-users in the assessment of candidates, and this is probably due to the nature of the programme (healthcare) and professional body requirements. However, there was also evidence of some assessments being graded on a pass/fail basis without a clear articulation of a scoring chart, rather being assessed on 'academic judgement'. Where this occurs it does not ensure parity of assessment and, therefore, arguably does not address principle 1 (**transparency**).

It is clear from reviewing the school and college responses that they perceive that the majority of assessments are undertaken using 'academic judgement' rather than based on a structured marking process, and this is in contrast with the HEP responses. When asked "how they know the grading scale is fairly applied", the qualitative responses in the questionnaire completed by schools and colleges clearly identified that 'they did not' and this may suggest a lack of **transparency** of information to these stakeholders (principle 1).

Communication with stakeholders (such as candidates/schools /colleges)

Additional admissions assessments were communicated to potential candidates through outreach sessions, taster days, prospectuses, open days and the website. For staff working in schools and colleges, additional admissions assessments were communicated through careers advisor training days

and school and college information sessions. However, research by Heaslip et al² identified that not all students, especially those from widening participation (WP) backgrounds, access open days. This is for a variety of reasons including time and finance, and so these students may be missing vital information regarding the assessments used. In addition, outreach sessions are not available for all potential candidates in all schools and anecdotal experience highlights that some schools and colleges are more receptive than others to working with higher education outreach teams. This, coupled with evidence from the Sutton Trust which identified that teachers were 'not equipped with the knowledge and expertise to advise'³, means that not all candidates and staff will be aware of the range of assessments used in HEIs. This may therefore not meet fair admissions principle 1 (**be transparent**), or principle 4 (**seek to minimise barriers for applicants**).

This research ultimately identified that further guidance to support HEPs in using additional admissions assessments is required. With this in mind, the following guidance has been developed to explore the use of additional admissions assessments, and provide a framework for selecting (or not selecting) to use them as part of a fair admissions process.

The process stages

Step 1. Preparation

Transparency: what is it you are looking for / why do you need to introduce an additional admissions assessment?

Although this might seem like a fairly straight forward step in the process for introducing an assessment, our research findings have suggested that there is wide variability in practice. It is because of this, that our story starts with the basics of 'preparation'.

Preparation could be a step initiated through the development of a new course, or through a revision of the current admissions assessment. Either way, a clear and transparent understanding of not only what you are looking for by introducing an assessment, but why you need to introduce it is required. If HE providers aren't clear at these early stages, it may be that they select an inappropriate method (i.e. it doesn't actually add value to the application process) or that they create barriers to the admissions process (which would go against the principles of fair admissions). This early understanding also means HE providers can clearly articulate the reasoning to all stakeholders, and most importantly the applicant.

The following '**challenge questions**' should be covered through the 'preparation stage'.

1. What are you looking for by introducing an additional admissions assessment?
2. Why do you need to introduce an assessment, and what benefit does it provide you through the admissions process?
3. Can the introduction of an assessment be fairly administered?
4. Do you have the evidence to support why this is the selected method?

The following policy implications should also be considered:

- Do your academic regulations allow for the use of an additional admissions assessment?
- Does your admissions policy allow for the use of the assessment?

² Heaslip, V., Hewitt-Taylor, J., Alexander, P., Ellis-Hill, C., Seibert-Santos, C., 2015. What factors influence Fair Access students to consider university and what do they look for? *Journal of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*. 17(4); 67-88.

³ Sutton Trust. (2008) 'Increasing higher education participation amongst disadvantaged young people and schools in poor communities'. Available at: www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/1NCEE_interim_report.pdf [accessed 09.06.2015].

- Who needs to be involved when considering the use of the assessment? Who approves its use?

Step 2. Rationale for using an additional admissions assessment

Requirements to select applicants who are able to complete the course

Having a clear understanding for why an assessment is needed will not only aid the admissions process, but will also help determine the types of methods used and its assessment. For some industry sectors (i.e. health and social care, and teaching) there are prescriptive methods that will be pre-determined for use, however we still need to understand what the rationale is, as that in many ways is more important than just following a requirement.

There can be a range of reasons for using or introducing an assessment, such as:

- Professional body requirements (i.e. Nursing, Social Work, Allied Health Professionals)
- Specialist skill-set requirements (i.e. Fine Arts, Musical Theatre, Engineering)
- Widening participation requirements (i.e. consideration of a wider admissions set, including contextual information)
- Selective requirements (i.e. a filtering mechanism to 'select' from equally eligible applicants)
- Others (i.e. to support information, advice and guidance, for example in ensuring the candidate is applying for the course that is the 'best fit' for them)

If your rationale for use is not clear, then it needs to be considered carefully as it will likely mean that it is also not clear to applicants or advisers, and potentially creates a barrier for entry.

The following '**challenge questions**' should be covered through the 'rationale stage'.

5. Do you fully understand why you are introducing an assessment?
6. Are there any prescriptive requirements you must follow when using an assessment?
7. Will using an assessment provide useful and additional information that can't be achieved through academic assessment alone?
8. Have you considered alternative methods that will achieve the same outcome?

The following policy implications should also be considered:

- Do your academic regulations take into consideration external admissions requirements, such as those from a professional body?
- Does your admissions policy take into consideration external admissions requirements, such as those from a professional body?

Step 3. Assessment type

What 'type' of assessment do you want to use? Does it assess for the skills you need?

Now that you better understand the reasoning for including an assessment in the process, you will need to select the 'type' and how this assesses the skills needed. Given each higher education provider will have its own set of programmes, this is a decision for each individual institution. The types of assessments used range from an array of interview styles and techniques, through to the more traditional tests, portfolios and auditions. There is also a specific option on 'other' to take into

consideration developing assessments, such as assessment centres, psychometrics and problem based learning (PBL) workshops.

Each type will have its own uses and benefits, but it is important that whichever method is selected, it adds value to the application process. The following table provides some basis around the four common methods and links to relevant resources.

Type	Considerations	Resources
Interview	<p>The type and purpose of interviews needs to be considered. This could be one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a subject-specific 'selection' interview prior to a decision being made • a recruitment tool, that is an 'interview' before or after an offer is made to encourage the applicant to choose the institution as their firm choice • an interview to differentiate between applicants who appear very similar on paper • an interview to assess not just suitability to undertake the course or programme but also to seek evidence of ability for a particular profession • a group interview to assess skills of interaction • a multiple-mini interview (MMI) • a semi-structured interview which can allow conversation to enable interviewees to give a fuller account of themselves • an interview where questions are not prescribed but interviewers have a clear set of themes or areas to explore • an information-giving activity, if students are progressing within an institution or partnership from one level to another e.g. from a Foundation Diploma to an undergraduate degree 	<p>Adapted from 'SPA good practice in interviewing applicants for admission to HE' (Aug, 2013), p. 4-5. https://www.spa.ac.uk/resources/interviews</p> <p>SPA good practice toolkit module on interviews (log-in required) www.spagoodpractice.com</p> <p>e.g. University of Cambridge guidance for interviews http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/admissions-assessments/at-interview</p> <p>UCAS interview information https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/apply-and-track/track-your-application/interview-invitations</p>
Test	<p>The type and purpose of testing needs to be considered. This could be one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of a national test, such as UKCAT, BMAT, LNAT, STEP or GAMSAT in order to have common level for comparison • Testing for admissions reasons i.e. numeracy and literacy for those without GCSE equivalent, or to supplement details for applicants with unfamiliar qualifications • Testing for diagnostic reasons i.e. to better understand the level of skill that is not represented through an academic grade, such as understanding arguments and reasoning 	<p>SPA information on admissions tests https://www.spa.ac.uk/resources/admissions-tests (See also box below)</p> <p>UCAS information on admissions tests https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/entry-requirements/admissions-tests</p> <p>UCAS advice on how to prepare for interviews auditions and tests https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/how-prepare-interviews-auditions-and-tests</p>
Portfolio	<p>The type and purpose of portfolio needs to be considered. This could be one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical or digital portfolio to showcase skills, techniques and creative interests • Media selection i.e. photography, fine art, sculpture, graphic design etc. • Practical skill and its use in application i.e. ability to use multiple media channels and represent that through the portfolio • Awareness of contemporary practice and practitioners • Knowledge of discipline • Evidence of individuality 	<p>University of the Arts: portfolio preparation http://www.arts.ac.uk/study-at-ual/apply/portfolio-preparation/</p> <p>Guardian guide http://www.theguardian.com/education/mortarboard/2013/aug/28/how-to-prepare-an-arts-portfolio-for-university</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prescriptive assignment or open to interpretation 	Student art guide http://www.studentartguide.com/articles/how-to-make-an-art-portfolio-for-college-or-university
Audition	The type and purpose of an audition needs to be considered. This could be one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical or pre-recorded audition to showcase skills, techniques and creative interests • Discipline type i.e. music, musical theatre, acting, dance etc. • Practical skill and its use in application i.e. ability to perform an interest piece live • Awareness of contemporary practice and practitioners • Knowledge of discipline • Evidence of individuality • Prescriptive assignment or open to interpretation 	UCAS advice on making the most of your audition https://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-conservatoires-making-most-of-audition.pdf

SPA's considerations for a good admissions test below complements the points above.

SPA criteria for a good admissions test:

- Have rigorous validation and reliability testing.
- Be supported by statistical and research evidence.
- Ensure the minimum of bias in the test questions so the test is valid for applicants from all backgrounds in a UK context.
- Be readily available and accessible to those with evidence of specific requirements in a timely way.
- Provide exemplar materials and tests with answers.
- Be fairly and professionally administered.
- Be able to demonstrate it is fit for purpose and add value as part of holistic decision-making.
- Be approved for use through the HE provider's relevant structures and processes.
- Have a clear process within published complaints and appeals procedures to allow applicants to query or dispute aspects of the handling of the test.

The following '**challenge questions**' should be covered through the 'assessment type stage'.

9. Do you have an assessment that is appropriate and that fairly supports the admissions process?
10. Who needs to approve the use of this assessment type?
11. Who needs to be involved in the assessment of this type, and are they free and available (as well as trained to do this)?
12. How will the assessment be graded, and is this in a form that can be shared with applicants as feedback?
13. How are the results recorded?

The following policy implications should also be considered:

- Do your academic regulations allow for this type of assessment?
- Does your admissions policy allow for this type of assessment?
- Who needs to be involved when considering the use of the assessment? Who approves its use?
- Where will the results be recorded?
- Have you taken into consideration the requirements for Freedom of Information (FOI)?

Step 4. Impact Assessment

What is the evidence base to validate its use? Are assessment methods are valid and reliable?

HE providers wouldn't look to run a programme without a valid and reliable assessment method, and therefore any additional admissions assessment that requires assessment should be considered in the same way. Our research has shown that there is still a significant portion of the industry that uses 'academic judgement' alone, and without any structured assessment method.

The following '**challenge questions**' should be covered through the 'impact assessment stage'.

14. Have you developed a clear, reliable and valid assessment method?
15. Is the assessment method comparable (i.e. between applicants) and does it provide enough detail to differentiate between applicants?
16. Could you use the assessment method for the year the applicant is entering? As an example, if they are entering into year 1 of a degree, could the assessment type for year 1 units/modules be used?
17. Is the assessment method actually testing for the additional skills/requirements you originally planned to test?
18. Are you creating a benchmark through this assessment? If you are, are you collecting the right details to create future evidence?
19. Who does the marking or makes the judgement? Is there more than one person?
20. How will the results be recorded?
21. How will feedback be provided?

The following policy implications should also be considered:

- Should this assessment follow the same rigour as a typical unit/module assessment?
- Who needs to be involved when considering the use of the assessment? Who approves its use?

Step 5. Communication

Are all internal and external stakeholders fully aware of the assessment requirements and rationale for use?

Our study has shown that less than 14% of institutions share their grading requirements with applicants undertaking an assessment. It is not surprising then to find in the research that staff in schools and colleges are also unclear on the details behind and rationale for using assessments. This is a key area, not only for transparency, but also because of requirements outlined in the advice to HE on consumer

protection law issued by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in March 2015⁴. This stated that HE providers must provide information to make it clear to potential students what they are required to do within the application and admissions processes for entry to the HE provider.

The following '**challenge questions**' should be covered through the 'communications stage'.

22. How are you planning to communicate the requirements of assessment to your applicants, their influencers and those involved in the admissions process?
23. Will you provide preparatory information?
24. Will you provide practice materials i.e. previous tests, example of portfolio?
25. Will you provide the marking schedule, pass mark, or the details of assessment method(s)?

The following policy implications should also be considered:

- Who is responsible for sending out communications?
- Who is responsible for updating materials i.e. print, online?
- How will you ensure any assessment content is compliant with consumer protection requirements?

Step 6. Monitor and assure

Applying a professional admission practice

Just like HE providers monitor the performance of our programmes, they also need to monitor the performance of our additional admissions assessments. This is for two main reasons, the first being to ensure it is still adding value to the process (and not just adding a barrier), but the second is to assure it supports the admission of applicants with the right set of skills for the programme.

Monitoring should also be a mechanism to help justify the continued use of or removal of an assessment.

The following '**challenge questions**' should be covered through the 'monitor and assure stage'.

26. How will you measure the performance of an assessment?
27. Are you able to collect and record the required details for monitoring?
28. Who will analyse the results of this monitoring, and who will make recommendations following the findings?
29. Who is responsible for deciding to continue, reassess or close an assessment?

The following policy implications should also be considered:

- Who is responsible for monitoring and assurance?
- Who is responsible for updating materials i.e. print, online if there is a change?
- How will you ensure any assessment content is CMA compliant?
- Who will update any policies based on this monitoring e.g. the admissions policy?

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-consumer-law-advice-for-providers>

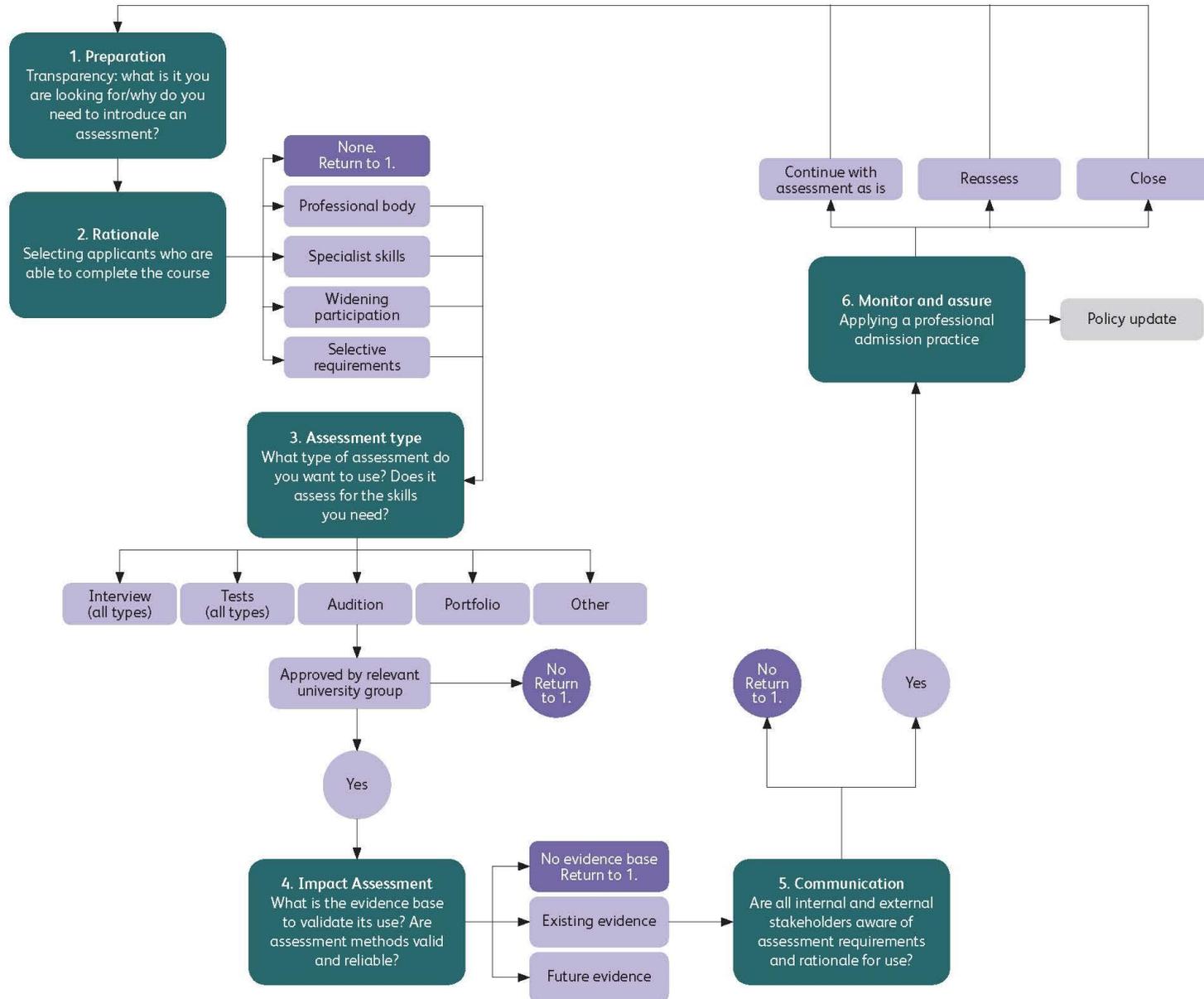
Conclusion

Additional admissions assessments are widely used to provide more information and context as part of holistic admissions decision making. Their use may be for professional body, specialist requirements or selective reasons, but regardless of the approach, higher education providers need to be transparent and professional in how and when they are used.

The process for additional admissions assessments covered in this paper offers a framework for considering and exploring the wider implications this will have within an institution. By using the challenge questions posed, an institution should be able to clearly articulate their rationale and what they aim to gain by using the respective assessment.

The use of an assessment can support institutions in ensuring the right applicant is selected for the right course for them. However the degree to which they meet the principles for fair admissions advocated by SPA is dependent upon the degree to which they have been systematically planned and integrated into the admissions process, and the transparency of those admissions processes. Failure to ensure that each step of the process is reliable and communicated effectively could lead to an unfair and unclear admissions process.

A process to ensure fair admissions in additional admissions assessments

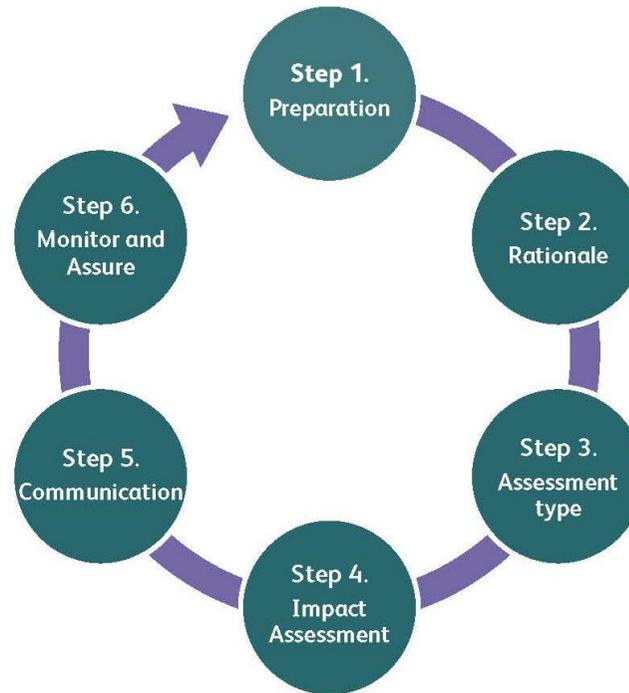


Additional Admissions Assessments - Challenge questions (quick reference guide)

- What are you looking for by introducing an assessment?
- Why do you need to introduce an assessment, and what benefit does it provide you through the admissions process?
- Can the introduction of an assessment be fairly administered?
- Do you have the evidence to support why this is the selected method?

- How will you measure the performance of an assessment?
- Are you able to collect and record the required details for monitoring?
- Who will analyse the results of this monitoring, as well as who will make recommendations of those findings?
- Who is responsible for deciding to continue, reassess or close an assessment?

- How will you be planning to communicate the requirements of the assessment to your applicants, their influencers and those involved in the admissions practice?
- Will you provide preparatory information?
- Will you provide practice materials i.e. previous tests, example of portfolio?
- Will you provide the marking schedule, pass mark, or the details of assessment method(s)?



- Do you fully understand why you are introducing an assessment?
- Are there any prescriptive requirements you must follow when using an assessment?
- Will using an assessment provide useful and additional information that can't be achieved through academic assessment alone?
- Have you considered alternatives that may achieve the same outcome?

- Do you have an assessment that is appropriate and that fairly supports the admissions process?
- Who needs to approve the use of this assessment type?
- Who needs to be involved in the assessment of this type, and are they free and available (as well as trained to do this)?
- How will the assessment be graded, and is this in a form that can be shared with applicants as feedback?
- How are the results recorded?

- Have you developed a clear, reliable and valid assessment method?
- Is the assessment method comparable (i.e. between applicants) and does it provide enough detail to differentiate between applicants?
- Could you use the assessment method for the year the applicant is entering?
- Is the assessment method actually testing for the additional skills/requirements you originally planned to test?
- Are you creating a benchmark through this assessment? If you are, are you collecting the right details to create future evidence?
- Who does the marking or makes the judgement? Is there more than one person?
- How will feedback be provided?

Case study: Bournemouth University Adult Nursing Programme

Preparation

Transparency: what is it you are looking for / why do you need to introduce an additional admissions assessment?

There have been increasing concerns nationally regarding the value base of nurses following the highly publicised Mid Staffordshire Hospital Trust scandal. In response to this, the Francis review (2013) identified the need to have a re-focus on values in the NHS. Health Education England (HEE) published a Value Based Framework in 2014, this framework is designed to attract and select candidates based upon how their individual values and behaviours align with the NHS constitution (2013). As a Health Education Providers providing undergraduate pre-registration nursing programmes we have to ensure that we are meeting these expectations.

Rationale for using an additional admissions assessment

Requirements to select applicants who are able to complete the course

Professional body guidance

In addition to the expectations identified above with regard to Values Based Recruitment, there is a secondary policy drive regarding patient engagement in the NHS (Department of Health 2013). Health Education Providers are expected to comply with the guidance published from HEE as 50% of student nurse programmes are based in healthcare settings. In addition, the statutory both for nursing (Nursing Midwifery Council (NMC)) have identified that Health Education Providers have to clearly demonstrate how service users/carers contribute to both programme design and delivery (NMC 2010). They also identify in the Standards for Pre-registration Nursing Education (NMC 2010:59) that the 'selection process provides an opportunity for face-to-face engagement between applicants and selectors'.

Assessment type

What 'type' of additional admissions assessment do you want to use? Does it assess for the skills you need?

In addition to the assessment attainment and subjects studied, personal statement and references, the programme wished to use both group and one-to-one interviews with academic, practice staff and service users/carers. The group interview specifically assesses the values highlighted in the NHS constitution.

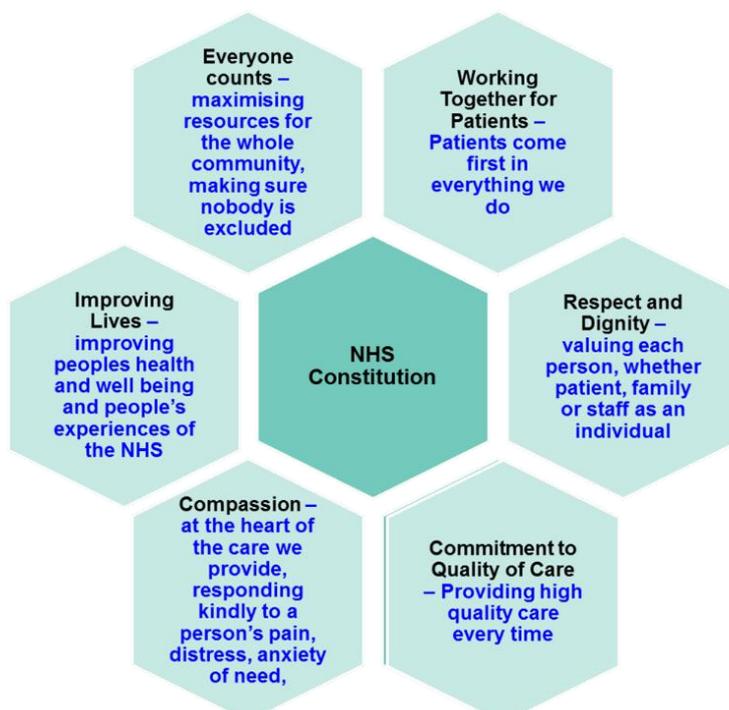
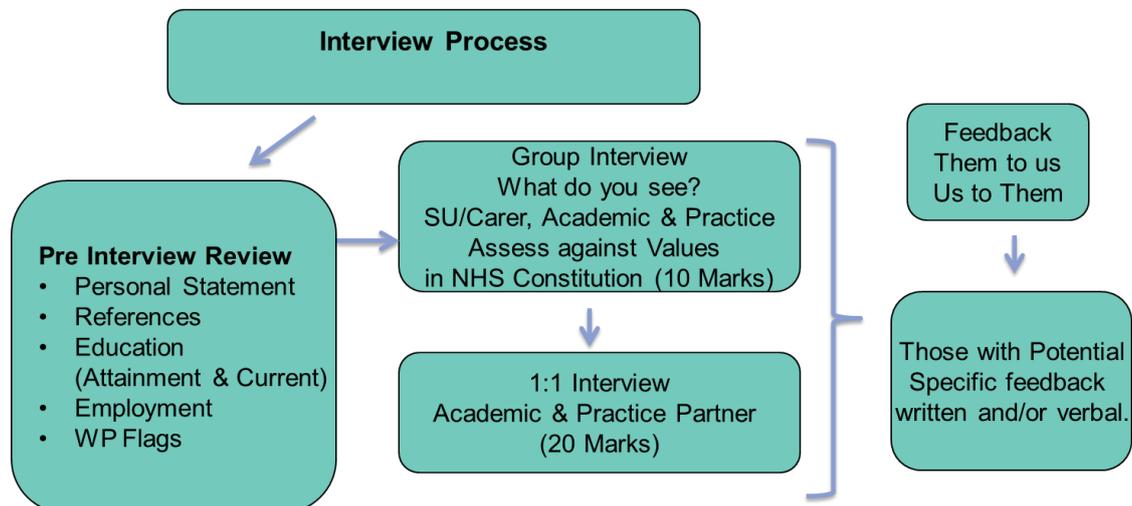


Figure one: values of the NHS Constitution

The interview process is broken down below. All of the applicants have a pre-interview review and those who do not meet the entry criteria are rejected and advice is provided regarding how to strengthen their application for the future. Those selected for interview undertake two assessments: a group interview and a one-to-one interview (see diagram below).

Figure two: interview process



Heaslip 2016

Whilst the evidence base regarding the effectiveness of the interview process is 'patchy'; it is a professional body requirement that candidates engage in a face-to-face discussion with the Health Education Provider. The group assessment is blind marked (scored individually by the academic, practice partner and service user), the scores are then shared and an agreed score made with all parties having equal power in the decision making process. Likewise the one-to-one interviews are also blind marked using a programme pre-agreed assessment scale, and again shared between parties and an agreed score is made.

Including service users (who have all received training on VBR and the NHS constitution) adds reliability to the process as they bring with them a different perspective from those that are looking through the lens of a professional nurse.

Communication

Are all internal and external stakeholders fully aware of the assessment requirements and rationale for use?

Information regarding the interview day and assessments used are shared with candidates in multiple ways including:

- On the website
- Open Days
- School visit/talks
- Career Advisor talks

However through an internal study (Heaslip *et al.*, 2015) we identified that not all candidates attended an open day (especially those who were from a widening participation background). Even though we provide full information on the webpage regarding our assessment for values aligned to the NHS

constitution in using this process to assess the use of assessment we have identified that we could also make this explicit in the interview letters sent to all candidates invited to interview. As such, we have amended our letter to include a link to the information provided on the website thus improving transparency.

Monitor and assure

Applying a professional admission practice

We are currently undertaking an evaluation of the role of Service Users in VBR (funded by Health Education Wessex) in order to begin to generate the wider evidence base regarding the use VBR in healthcare courses. In addition, through and at the end of each recruitment cycle, the academic lead for admissions in adult nursing undertakes a systematic review of the process including:

- Review of overall rejection rates
- Rejection rates per interviewers
- Review of all rejected candidates interview scores and notes. For those candidates who narrowly missed a place and have potential to succeed in the future we contact them providing them with further guidance to strengthen future applications.

An example of a 'lesson learnt' is that following a review of the last admission cycle, student nurses are now also involved in the interviewing of candidates.

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Case study: University of West of England Illustration Programme

Preparation

Transparency: what is it you are looking for / why do you need to introduce an assessment?

- To select the right student for the right creative course
- To match creative skills set to the appropriate course
- Provides an opportunity for face-to-face engagement between applicants and academics
- Illustration attracts a large number of undergraduate applicants and academic staff members will need to assess individual specialist skills to ensure students are eligible/capable of succeeding on the course

Rationale for using an additional admissions assessment

Requirements to select applicants who are able to complete the course

Specialist skills requirements (applicants should be able to demonstrate one or more of the following):

- An innovative approach to image making
- A good level of drawing skills e.g. life drawing/observational drawing
- Evidence of visual thinking and engagement with concepts
- Experimentation with digital and analogue (handmade) processes
- An individualistic and curious approach to image making

Assessment type

What 'type' of additional admissions assessment do you want to use? Does it assess for the skills you need?

- Digital portfolio (first stage of assessment) - portfolios to be reviewed and applicants shortlisted for interview. Skills assessed: good level of drawing, evidence of visual thinking and engagement with concepts, an individualistic and curious approach to image making
- Individual interview (second stage of assessment) - applicants to present a collection of their creative work, demonstrating a good practical ability in and understanding of their chosen field. Skills assessed: innovative approach to image making, experimentation with digital and analogue (handmade) processes, an individualistic and curious approach to *image making, communication*

The rationale for these assessment types will be approved/agreed by a number of stakeholder: Head of Department, Programme Leaders, Recruitment & Outreach and Admissions, and will form part of the course validation process.

Impact Assessment

What is the evidence base to validate its use? Are assessment methods are valid and reliable?

The Art and Design Department will expect Illustration applicants to have a portfolio of creative work ready to submit. A portfolio will demonstrate a strong commitment to the subject area and will display a certain specialist skills set, which will be developed (not taught) in the first year of the course. First year Illustration modules include:

- Narrative and Place
- Critical Perspectives
- Professional Practice and Work Experience

Students with no prior creative experience/skills are likely to struggle with the first year assessments, which includes projects, essays, group presentations and a visual presentation.

Portfolios and interviews form part of the selection process for BA (Hons) Illustration at our competitors. Applicants will be required to submit examples of their creative work and will be invited to attend an interview to discuss their work with potentially five different institutions.

Communication

Are all internal and external stakeholders fully aware of the assessment requirements and rationale for use?

As part of the approval process Programme Leaders and the Head of Department will have been informed. The Recruitment and Outreach Manager for the faculty will liaise with Admissions and will update the internal entry criteria, which is followed by the processing teams.

The International Office will communicate this selection process to our Regional Offices. Guidance notes will need to be created for Skype interviews for our international applicants.

Marketing will communicate details regarding the portfolio and interview on the course database for prospective students to view alongside the academic entry requirements. The specialist skills requirements will be listed as guidance on the website and in our printed prospectus too.

Prospective students will be informed of these assessment requirements at Open Days, outreach events, UCAS and Higher Education fairs.

Applicants will receive the e-portfolio request and guidance, as well as the interview invite via the applicant portal (Welcome website).

Monitor and Assure

Applying a professional admission practice

Applicants will be asked to complete a survey anonymously after attending their interview at our Bower Ashton campus. The survey questions will focus on their applicant experience (i.e. first impressions of the campus, whether the staff members helpful and knowledgeable etc.), but will also include specific questions about the entry requirements and additional assessments, for example:

On receiving the request to submit an e-portfolio did you feel:

- a) **Ready and prepared** to send your creative work immediately
- b) **Almost ready** but needed more time to finish some pieces of work
- c) **Nervous** about how much work would be seen as appropriate and not submitting enough
- d) **Concerned** about how thin your portfolio is and how much work will need to be done over the next month

Survey results will feed into the annual tariff review undertaken by the Recruitment and Outreach Manager and the faculty. As part of the annual review of the Admissions Policy, the section detailing entry criteria and additional assessments will be updated accordingly with any new processes and procedures.

Case study: University of South Wales Journalism Programme

An interview and test are required for the Journalism degree.

Preparation

Transparency: what is it you are looking for / why did you need to introduce an assessment?

- To select the right students for the course (an alternative may be more relevant to their needs/goals).
- To determine that the applicant possesses the required basic skills, knowledge and aptitudes.
- To provide an opportunity for one-to-one engagement between applicants and academics.

Rationale for using an additional admissions assessment

Requirements to select applicants who are able to complete the course

Journalism is a vocation that many students have an interest in without necessarily fully understanding what it involves. A level of understanding is sought prior to commencing the course and therefore the assessment that we employ serves a number of purposes:

- Evaluating an applicant's knowledge of general current affairs and news knowledge, as well as spelling and grammar.
- Assessing an applicant's understanding and commitment to the subject.
- Assessing an applicant's written work in time constrained conditions.
- Determining if the course is right for the applicant.

Assessment type

What 'type' of admissions assessment do you want to use? Does it assess for the skills you need?

1) Written test, maximum 30 minutes. This assesses the level of writing skills, knowledge of the world and current affairs, and general knowledge of news.

2) Interview. This provides an opportunity for the interviewer to assess an applicant's enthusiasm for and current knowledge of the subject. It also allows the applicant to raise questions and enter into a meaningful dialogue, helping to determine if the choice of course is correct.

Impact Assessment

What is the evidence base to validate its use? Are assessment methods are valid and reliable?

The Broadcasting and Journalism Department will expect Journalism applicants to have researched around the subject and be able to demonstrate that they understand and possess some of the skills required to be successful on the course. These will then be further developed and enhanced through the course. The department will also expect them to possess more than a basic level in investigation, writing, and communication skills.

An application form does not fulfil the assessment of these skills to an accurate enough degree. In this subject area there is recognition that Level 3 qualifications do not necessarily develop the basic skill levels on their own, and that these are often enhanced by an applicant's extracurricular experiences which can be better assessed in person. We aim to ensure that we are not setting applicants up to fail by discussing with them the options that best suit their skill set. Students without these "additional skills" are likely to struggle with elements of the first year of the course.

Communication

Are all internal and external stakeholders fully aware of the assessment requirements and rational for use?

As part of the validation process all academics (Head of School, Associate Head of School, Academic Manager, Course Leader and lecturers) will have fed into the decision. The Head of Admissions and the Director of Marketing are consulted as part of validation and internal communications to ensure that information is provided to potential applicants. The Enquiries and Admissions (E&A) team are informed when the course is advertised for recruitment.

The International Recruitment Office communicates requirements to its agents and updates the relevant international website pages.

Marketing executives update course web pages for course information, and E&A update the course entry criteria which includes UCAS Course Collect.

In addition, prospective students are informed of these assessment requirements at Open Days, outreach events, and UCAS and Higher Education fairs.

Monitor and assure

Applying a professional admission practice

Application data is monitored by a Market Analyst, who reports on a monthly basis to all senior University and Faculty staff. The Faculty undertakes an annual review of its assessment requirements to determine if they still remain suitable for selection purposes.

E&A monitor complaints (negative feedback) and accolades (positive feedback) and communicate these on a regular basis, where they occur, to senior executives within the Faculty for consideration, response and where appropriate, amendment to practice.

E&A is currently investigating the use of a new CRM system to introduce a customer experience survey into this process.