



Good practice statement on part-time admissions

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SPA Guidance and Good Practice Statements

Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme (SPA)

SPA is an independent and objective voice on UK higher education (HE) admissions. It leads on the development of fair admissions, providing an evidence base and recommendations for good practice and in helping universities and colleges maintain and enhance excellence and professionalism in admissions, student recruitment and widening participation/access. SPA works closely with HE institutions and other stakeholders to provide outputs as a resource for institutions which wish to develop and update their admissions practice and policy to enhance quality, transparency, reputation and fairness. Full information on SPA and its work can be found at www.spa.ac.uk.

SPA Guidance and Good Practice Statement

This guidance has been prepared by SPA in response to requests from institutions offering HE courses. Our objective is to provide good practice which has been derived from the analysis of evidence collected by SPA from discussions with staff on visits to institutions, at conferences, evidence from institutions policy and practice, and from desk-based research. There are a number of SPA good practice statements which aim to provide a wide range of staff in universities and colleges with principles and examples to consider to enable them to review and update their own policies and practices. Heads and deputy heads of institutions, senior managers, admissions and registry staff, student services staff, equality and diversity practitioners and student officers and representatives may find the statement of value and assistance.

In the UK admissions standards, requirements, procedures, policies and decisions are the responsibility of each individual HE institution. This principle was affirmed in the Schwartz Report on Fair Admissions (2004)¹ and is set out in law.²

Disclaimer

This good practice statement is for general guidance only, and should not be taken as a list of obligations or a legal document. SPA emphasises that it does not offer legal advice and cannot take any responsibility for actions taken based on this information. Institutions must always take their own legal advice as they see appropriate.

SPA good practice statements are kept under review and updated as appropriate. Your comments or updates are invited and appreciated, please contact enquiries@spa.ac.uk

¹ *Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice –The Schwartz Report, September 2004* (consulted 14 January 2010)

² Legal Responsibility

- In England and Wales this responsibility in the case of HEIs is detailed in the Higher Education Act 2004, Part 3, Section 32, subsection 2 (b) which states that the Director of OFFA (or the Welsh Assembly Government in Wales) has a duty to protect academic freedom including, in particular, the freedom of institutions to determine the criteria for the admission of students and apply those criteria in particular cases.
- In Scotland this is enshrined in the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005. Section 9 Subsections 1 and 2 of the Act stipulates that the Scottish Ministers may make grants to the Scottish Funding Council subject to such terms and conditions as the Scottish Ministers consider it appropriate to impose but Subsection 12 (b) (ii) stipulates that ‘Terms and conditions imposed under subsection (2) may not be framed by reference to the admission of students.’
- SPA believes the same responsibility and protection applies to institutions in Northern Ireland under similar legislation (the 2004 HE Act states that only Part 1 extends to the entire UK and Section 32, 2, (b) comes within Part 3).

Good Practice Statement on Part-time Admissions

1. Introduction, context and basis for Good Practice Statement:

Background and context

Part-time study is currently high on the political agenda³ and is a subject of discussion and consideration by a number of think-tanks and educational and economic organisations as well as in the media⁴. The higher education (HE) sector is being encouraged to look at part-time provision as one way to support many objectives including enhancing fair access, improving access for adults and helping students to study flexibly, as well as supporting the UK within the global economy by encouraging HE to work with employers, further education institutions and other providers to develop courses and enhance higher-level skills.

Function of this Statement

To help meet the needs of the sector and to develop good practice in this area SPA has developed this Good Practice Statement on the admission of part-time students.⁵

The Statement is intended to offer guidance to institutions on both the principles which should apply when applicants for part-time courses are considered and on practical issues such as the definition of part-time students, how institutions could make information available, application procedures and a range of related issues.

In keeping with one of SPA's key themes, the 'Applicant Experience Strategy'⁶, admissions will be taken to extend from initial enquiry, through the formal admissions process, to registration and enrolment.

Differences within the UK

Although this is a subject of interest across the UK, and is a priority for all governments, policies differ between administrations. HEIs will be aware of the policies of the government under which they operate.⁷

2. 'Part-time' students - definition and characteristics

Definition

There are many different 'types' of part-time student and discussion with colleagues across HE indicates that the 'official' distinctions made between them are often very subtle and may not be relevant in an admissions context. A fuller outline of the various definitions is given in Appendix 2 but they may include students on 'traditional' evening or day release courses, on 'blended learning' programmes combining intensive periods at the institution with distance learning, web-based learning, recreational evening programmes and mixtures of all of these.

Some institutions feel strongly that the term 'part-time' is unhelpful as it implies a distinction

³ For example, in England in the BIS Secretary of State's speech given on 15 July 2010
<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/content/Detail.aspx?NewsAreaID=2&ReleaseID=414467> Consulted 23 August 2010

⁴ A list of some reports on part-time students and related issues is given in Appendix 7.

⁵ The Objective approved by the SPA Steering Group, is set out in Appendix 1.

⁶ www.spa.ac.uk/resources/applicant-experience-strategy Consulted 9 June 2010

⁷ A brief consideration of some of the policy issues affecting different UK governments is given in Appendix 5.

between different types of students which is divisive and unnecessary. Others, by contrast, feel it reflects programmes which have been designed to meet the needs of students who wish to integrate study with wider responsibilities.

Advisers comment that currently there is confusion amongst advisers and applicants over terminology. They wish for consistency so that it is clear to applicants and their advisers when searching for opportunities.

For the purposes of this Good Practice Statement we would make the following recommendations:

- **For admissions purposes the definition of ‘part-time’ should be as wide as possible, to encompass many different types of programme. Within promotional and other materials institutions can then make distinctions between different programmes and types of delivery.**
- **In their promotional materials (including on websites) institutions should make explicit reference to part-time opportunities, policies and procedures. The term ‘part-time’ is well established and enquirers and their advisers may use this term when searching promotional materials and sites. Of course other terms may be used in addition; for example, to emphasise the relationship with employers.**
- **Those institutions which prefer to emphasise that they make no distinction between ‘part-time’ and ‘full-time’ students should still mention the term ‘part-time’, to assist potential applicants. They can then make explicit reference to their view of the matter and the fact that part-time students are considered to be ‘the same as’ or ‘equal to’ full-time.**
- **Institutions need to be aware of the ‘standard’ HESA definition (see Appendix 2) whether or not they commonly use it in dealings with applicants. It is of significance to the institution as it affects both the level of funding received by the institution for a student and the way statistical information is reported. From the student’s point of view the definition makes a difference as it affects opportunities for financial support and issues such as social security benefits.**

Characteristics⁸

When thinking of part-time students it is useful to consider whether their views and their expectations of their course may be very different from full-time students. For example, some expert colleagues in HEIs report that their part-time students have more of a focus on outcomes, ‘value-for money’ in employment terms and a fast and efficient service and less interest in building new social networks and being part of an institution community than their full-time equivalents.⁹ Consequently the students may not always seek the same type of engagement with the HEI as the full-time student. There may also be substantial differences between different part-time groups (for example, the interests and needs of postgraduate distance-learning and of locally-based Foundation Degree students may be very different).¹⁰

⁸ Some issues which may be particularly significant in the case of part-time students are listed in Appendix 4.

⁹ Discussion at Conference ‘Enhancing the Student Experience 2009’, Thursday 19th November 2009, London, Workshop B1, Part-time students, led by Dr. Mark O’Hara, Sheffield Hallam University

¹⁰ When considering the attitudes and motivation of part-time students and barriers to study HEIs may be interested in the report:

3. Strategic management and institutional commitment

It is, of course, the responsibility of each institution to decide what it will teach and the ways in which it will teach it.

We expect, however, that institutions will wish to consider issues surrounding part-time study as part of their general consideration of recruitment, widening inclusion and admissions, as markets for their courses and as part of their teaching and learning strategy. On the basis that institutions wish to do this we make the following recommendations:

- **Strategic responsibility for part-time applicant issues**

Both the provision of part-time opportunities, and recruitment and admission to part-time courses, should be an integral part of the institution's normal academic control and management structure – i.e. it should be considered within the normal committee structure and be the responsibility of a senior member of staff.

Part-time issues may be considered by a specific individual, or by a special part-time Committee or Group, or by a general Recruitment and Admissions or Lifelong Learning Committee and be brought to the attention of senior management as necessary.

- **Planning**

Planning staff will wish to consider part-time issues when reviewing the institution's future activities. They will bear in mind a range of issues including the stated interest of the Funding Councils and of governments in encouraging part-time study, the complex realities of funding and support to institutions for part-time students¹¹, markets, staff commitments, timetabling and building utilisation and many more.

- **Institution's Mission**

It is important that the place of part-time learning opportunities should be considered within the institution's mission and as part of its strategies for teaching and learning, recruitment and marketing, widening inclusion, admissions and retention.

- **Market opportunities**

Institutions will wish to assess the market for part-time courses as part of their normal market surveys; this may include assessing demand for courses in particular subjects, or for particular industries or employers, or by modes of study, on a local/ regional/ national basis.

- **Information and monitoring.**

Information on the market for part-time study and on the recruitment, admission and retention of part-time students should form part of the institution's normal information and monitoring procedures (see also Section 6).

4. Admission of part-time students

Principles, policies, entry requirements and relationship with the applicant

General good practice principles

Principles which are accepted as being good practice in the admission of full-time students also extend to the admission of part-time students. These include:

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)'s Code of Practice, Section 10, Admissions to Higher Education 2006 ¹²

The Schwartz Report of 2004 (Section D2)¹³ recommends that (HEIs) should adopt the following principles:

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

And of course SPA's own recommendations for good practice – for example, in the area of interviews or feedback – are also applicable to part-time students.¹⁴

Admissions Policies¹⁵

An institution's admissions policy underlies everything it does in the area of the admission of students, from enquiries, recruitment and outreach to making and transmitting decisions, relationship building, diversity, transition support, registration and beyond. In the case of part-time applicants some institutions include them within the main institution admissions policy, while others have a separate 'part-time' policy.

- **SPA recommends that general admissions policies specifically acknowledge that they apply also to part-time applicants. Of course institutions may have 'additional' or 'sub-policies' (applying also to other groups, such as international applicants or those requiring additional support) but we feel that it is important that part-time students are recognised in the main policy to emphasise the institution's interest in and commitment to part-time applicants.**

As noted earlier (in Section 2) we understand that some institutions feel that it is important not to make distinctions between full-time and part-time applicants in admissions policies, to emphasise that no distinction is made and that part-time applicants are given equal treatment. While this view is understood, we feel that this principle of equity would not be compromised by a brief explicit confirmation that many different types of students are included within the policy; indeed, stating that the admissions policy applies equally to part-

¹² www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section10/default.asp. Consulted 30 July 2010

¹³ Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice, Section D2, www.admissions-review.org.uk/downloads/finalreport.pdf Consulted 30 July 2010

¹⁴ www.spa.ac.uk/ Consulted 2 August 2010

¹⁵For Guidance on Admissions Policies see SPA's 'Admissions Policies: Guidance for higher education providers' www.spa.ac.uk/resources/admissions-policies Consulted 30 July 2010.

time applicants can be used to assert the institution's stance.

Entry Requirements

There may traditionally have been a view that part-time applications are not subject to the same level of entry requirements and selection as full-time courses and may even be open to all without formal entry requirements. However, while this may be appropriate it cannot be assumed; bearing in mind the demands of part-time study it is even possible that entry requirements should be *more* exacting. As with all courses, institution must decide what requirements it considers are appropriate and should make these transparent. SPA's recommendations are as follows:

- **The setting of entry requirements for part-time courses should form part of the normal academic processes of the institution and should be approved by an appropriate academic body. Of course if the institution wishes to set special requirements for part-time courses, bearing in mind the different nature of the intake and different needs and interests of part-time students, it is quite appropriate and a matter for the institution to decide.**
- **Some professional courses may have specific requirements that institutions will need to adhere to (requirements at GCSE and equivalent levels, for example). These should be made clear to potential applicants.**
- **Part-time courses (and in fact all courses) should be willing to consider a range of qualifications and forms of evidence for the potential to study successfully. Consequently the institution should have in place a range of policies covering the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), including both the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) and the accreditation of prior experience and learning (APEL). This will assist potential applicants in understanding what, if any, standing or recognition can be given to other qualifications and experience, and also what steps they should take to have qualifications and experience recognised.**
- **Institutions should consider any special entry requirements that should be set in the case of part-time students (for example, support from an employer, or internet access)**
- **Institutions may wish to use contextual information in considering applications for part-time courses. If they do intend to use such data they should consider whether the data to be used, and the conclusions to be drawn, should be the same as for full-time students or whether there are different factors specific to part-time students which must be considered.**

Commitment by the applicant

As with all applicants, it is important that part-time applicants should be clear about the commitments they are making, in terms of both their study commitments and their legal relationship with the institution. Consequently SPA recommends that institutions ensure part-time applicants are clear about:

- **The implications of part-time study.**
They will be entering into a very substantial commitment of time and effort and it is important to make clear that students must be prepared and must plan for this.
- **The terms and conditions of the offer.**
Institutions may wish to consider whether there are any particular aspects of this which are

unique to, or especially significant in the case of, part-time applicants.

5. Application process for part-time students

Organisation of the admissions process

There is currently considerable variation between institutions in the way they organise the processing of part-time applications. In some HEIs applications for part-time study are dealt with by the main admissions office; in others they are dealt with by a specialist unit (such as Lifelong Learning) or by academic units (particularly where part-time provision is concentrated in one academic area). We are not currently aware that one model is better than others (though we would welcome examples of best practice in this area from institutions).

SPA recommends that the following is in place in accordance with the HEI's established procedures (as it will be in all admissions processes).

- **I.T. Systems integration**

There should be integration with the main admissions and student record system to ensure that data on each applicant is captured and used in the HEI's normal data collection and review procedures (separate 'stand alone systems run the risk of applicants not receiving appropriate information and support from the institution).

- **Admissions processes**

As with all admissions, there should be monitoring of the quality of the admissions process to ensure transparency, fairness and consistency, wherever in the institution it takes place.

- **Information for applicants**

Systems should be integrated so that applicants receive all appropriate information and details of support arrangements etc. at both the level of the institution and of the academic unit.

- **Point of contact**

Whatever way the HEI chooses to deal with applications *within* the institution, application procedures and contact points *for the applicant* must be clear, simple and unambiguous (see also Section 7, Information for Applicants).

Application processes

Applicants generally apply to part-time undergraduate courses direct (rather than through a centralised system, as in the case of full-time undergraduates who apply through UCAS). Applicants may apply by a variety of means; online fully electronic, online by means of a downloadable form, by emailing an application, by a hard copy form, by nomination by an employer or simply by turning up and registering at a class.

Advanced technological solutions may be attractive for many reasons, and institutions may well have advanced IT systems available from their software suppliers or from in-house support teams. SPA recognises that electronic application systems have many advantages over 'paper-based' ones for applicants and institutions and should be preferred if possible. However institutions should also bear in mind that the skills, resources and support available to applicants for part-time courses will vary very widely (more so than 'traditional' UCAS applicants).

National Scheme. The possibility of a national application scheme for part-time applicants is sometimes raised; this issue is discussed in Appendix 3.

Information to be collected in an application

It is important not to burden an applicant with excessive requests for data while, at the same time, obtaining the information which the institution requires. This is dealt with in detail in Section 6, below.

Who should consider applications?

As with full-time and other applications, different institutions will have different policies and procedures. For example, in some cases applications will be considered by academic staff in departments while in others they will be considered by administrative staff in admissions or Lifelong Learning offices. A variety of models are possible and there is currently no generally accepted model of best practice but whatever model is adopted must be clear, both to applicants and to staff within the institution, and all staff involved in admissions should be receive appropriate training and support.

Interviews and Auditions

Just as with other applicants, for some courses it may be appropriate to interview or audition applicants.

SPA recommends, consequently, that:

- **Institutions should make sure that they can accommodate the needs of as many applicants as possible through a wide variety of routes.**
- **As with applications for all modes of attendance, applications for part-time study should be considered according to approved, documented, procedures.**
- **Procedures should be transparent and easily found by applicants and advisers on websites and in promotional literature.**
- **If it is considered necessary to audition or interview applicants HEIs should, of course, bear in mind that part-time applicants may not be able to attend during 'normal' office hours and should try to accommodate them at other times.¹⁶**
- **All staff involved in admissions should receive appropriate training and support**

6. Part-time applicants – data collection and monitoring

Proper consideration of statistical information can make clear the importance of part-time students to institutions.

Application process and data collection

An important part of the admission process for all students is the collection of information for statistical purposes for:

- Institutional purposes – managing admissions, monitoring and evaluation of applicants' success in progression
- Funding bodies and other organisations (such as HESA).

¹⁶ HEIs may find SPA's Good Practice Statement on 'Interviewing applicants for admission to undergraduate university and college courses or programmes' helpful www.spa.ac.uk/resources/interviews. Consulted 21 June 2010

Many colleagues in institutions feel there is a possibility that potential applicants may be discouraged by what they perceive as an ‘excessive’ level of bureaucracy in the application process (particularly if they are only doing a short course, for example). It is important to consider:

- **What information is required for HESA and other agencies and for the institution itself and, consequently, what information *must* be collected from all applicants including part-time**
- **Following from this, HEIs should consider whether the same *level* of information needs to be collected from all types of applicant (e.g. someone who is registering for a Bachelor’s degree or one class on local history)?**

Reports and statistics

- **As noted in Section 3, for strategic management purposes it is important that issues connected with part-time applicants should be considered at the same level and with the same attention as other applicants. Consequently, appropriate data and statistics should be considered at a strategic level, by the appropriate policy bodies and committees, to support informed policy development.**
- **To assist strategic management and to enable monitoring to take place effectively, it is important that information collected on part-time applicants and students should be integrated with the main systems, so that reports and statistics can be drawn up easily and so that the statistics can be relied upon (separate ‘stand alone systems run the risk of applicants not receiving appropriate information and support from the institution).**

Diversity and Equality

It may be the case that part-time and full-time applicants and students have particular characteristics which need to be borne in mind by the institution. For example, it may be found that a greater number of part-time students are female, or disabled, so before taking any action which affects part-time students institutions may wish to ensure that this is not indirect discrimination¹⁷. A list of possible issues is given in Appendix 4.

- **Consequently it is important that institutions, when monitoring data, should include consideration of whether part-time applicants have ‘protected’ characteristics in terms of the Equality Act 2010 and take advice in this matter if necessary.**

7. Financial issues

Reports and comments have often noted the differences in financial support for part-time and full-time students, in relation both to funding for individual students and to support for institutions.¹⁸ There appears to be widespread concern that this is both unfair and inefficient and questions have been being raised as to whether this distinction should remain.¹⁹

¹⁷ Equality Act 2010, Section 19 - www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_bill.aspx consulted 21 June 2010. Also consult the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) guidance at www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-act-2010 consulted 21 June 2010.

¹⁸ For example, the speeches by Richard Lambert, Director-General, CBI and Chancellor, Warwick University, on 8 June 2010 (www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/20100608-cbi-richard-lambert-univ-sheffield-lecture.pdf), or by Prof. Steve Smith, President of UUK, on 9

The issue of funding – both for institutions and for individuals – is highly complex but we would make the following comments:

Issues for institutions

Currently funding to institutions for part-time students is very complex; we understand from colleagues that some current funding arrangements may actually discourage institutions from offering part-time opportunities and that the complexity of the arrangements can make advance planning difficult.²⁰

Issues for applicants

Support for part-time students is a highly complex area. A particular issue is the effect their study may have on social security and other benefits and entitlements. It is important to include as much relevant information as possible, either directly or by links to other websites, including information on tuition fees, loans, bursaries and grants etc..

It is also important that institutions should direct potential applicants, their families and advisers, to institutions' own student money advisers who will be able to give detailed advice on the situation for part-time students.

SPA recommends, therefore, that:

Governments across the UK consider

- **whether present funding arrangements for part-time students give institutions the support for part-time study which policies claim to support and thus can make the admissions of part-time students an attractive option for institutions**
- **whether the quality and availability of the information they provide on financial support for part-time students (including the effect such support may have on state benefits, etc.) is adequate**

Institutions ensure that

- **they provide full information on the financial support available to part-time students, on any support they offer themselves and on the advice and guidance their money advisers are able to provide**

8. Recruitment and Marketing

Part-time study – in all of its many forms – is an integral part of an institution's offer and it is important that this is supported by both recruitment and marketing materials and staff expertise.

September 2010 (www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Newsroom/Speeches/Pages/ProfessorSteveSmithAnnualConference2010.aspx), both consulted 14 September 2010.

¹⁹ In England, the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance has fees policy and financial support for part-time students as part of its remit <http://hereview.independent.gov.uk/hereview/> Consulted 23 August 2010.

See also the BIS Secretary of State's speech given on 15 July 2010

<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/content/Detail.aspx?NewsAreaID=2&ReleaseID=414467> Consulted 23 August 2010

²⁰ It is interesting to note that funding arrangements also vary significantly between the UK's different administrations; in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland funding models currently view part-time students as 'proportions' of full-time, while in Wales a 'credit-based' model is used (notes on the policies of different governments are given in Appendix 5).

As noted in Section 2, 'Characteristics', the priorities and motivations of part-time students may differ from those of their full-time colleagues and there may also be substantial differences between different part-time groups. Consequently it is important that the priorities and motivations of different groups of part-time students are considered when websites are being designed and materials are being produced.²¹

We recommend that:

- **Recruitment and marketing staff are aware of part-time opportunities, are able to respond to questions about them and include part-time opportunities when promoting the HE institution.**
- **All the HEI's staff, in all parts of the institution which may have contact with enquirers or potential applicants, should be aware of whether or not there are part-time opportunities and should be able to direct enquirers to the appropriate part of the website, or to the appropriate office or to the relevant staff members.**
- **Appropriate materials and websites are produced for part-time applicants, just as they are for full-time (suggestions of some of the detailed information needed by part-time applicants is given in Section 8).**

9. Information for prospective part-time students

All applicants, full and part-time, need clearly presented and appropriate information and the needs of all must be considered (there must be 'parity of transparency' between full and part-time applicants). However, while information on opportunities and practical issues is vital to all potential applicants and applicants in the case of part-time students it is often particularly difficult to find.

We feel that the points identified below may be helpful, but are of course not exhaustive.

Information at Institution level

At institutional level we recommend that information should be presented as follows:

- **There should at least be one area or page of each HEIs website which brings information on part-time opportunities together.**
- **The website search facility should make it easy to specify and search for specifically part-time options. If possible it should also be possible to make a distinction between undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) options and between different modes of study (evening, distance, etc.).**

Of course the above may be supplemented by additional information on other parts of the site – but there should still be a basic 'part-time' page and a good search facility.

- **Specific information for part-time applicants should include the following:**
 1. The courses which are offered, including the level (Foundation Degree/Bachelor's etc.)
 2. The Contact Point. It is vital to be clear about the point of contact with the institution for applicants, for further information about courses, application processes and support

²¹ Of course institutions always ensure that their recruitment, marketing and promotional materials are focussed and appropriate for their different markets.

arrangements

3. Admissions and entry requirements.
This should include clear statements on the accreditation of prior learning (APL), both Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) and prior experience and learning (APEL), and information on 'vocational' and other professional qualifications that may be particularly related to specific areas of activity. This may appear best at course or programme level.
4. Detailed information about timetabling, so that part-time students can make arrangements for travel, care for dependents, etc.. While it is appreciated that precise times and rooms can probably not be given it should be possible to identify the days on which classes take place.
5. Learner support arrangements, including details of which services are open at which times (bearing in mind the particular needs of part-time students)
6. Clear information about the commitment students are taking on when starting part-time study so that they understand what will be involved to lead to satisfactory completion of the course.
7. If programmes are offered with employers, any special arrangements including contacts at employers and at the institution.
8. The arrangements for part-time students to pay tuition fees and other charges may be more complex than for more 'traditional' full-time students. HEIs should both make appropriate arrangements (including opening finance offices outside standard office hours) and communicate these to applicants.
9. Financial information
As noted in Section 7, the financial issues surrounding part-time students are very complex. It is important to include as much relevant information as possible, either directly or by links to other websites, including information on tuition fees, loans, bursaries and grants etc., and by directing potential applicants, and their families and advisers, to institutions' own student money advisers.

Of course, good quality information for applicants, as well as support from recruitment staff, is likely to promote student retention, as part-time students will have a clearer idea of the realities of their commitment and of the course of study they intend to undertake.

At national level

In the case of full-time undergraduate courses information on almost all courses is available through UCAS. The situation of part-time courses, by contrast, is similar to that of postgraduate opportunities; although there are national websites offering information on programmes there is not universal comprehensive coverage.

Some organisations and institutions have responded to SPA saying that a national source of information is needed (such as UCAS – see Appendix 3) and would raise the standing of part-time study; others, by contrast, are of the view that a national information network is inappropriate in the case of part-time study, which is usually a 'local' undertaking (except, of course, in the case of the Open University and Distance Learning programmes).

While SPA does not have a view on the outcome of this particular discussion, we do recommend that:

- **HEIs provide information to the 'official' collectors of information and ensure that**

any information held is up-to-date.²²

10. Advice and Guidance to prospective part-time students

As noted in Section 6, above, HEIs must ensure that information on part-time opportunities is easily found.

It is also important that HE advisers consider part-time study as a valid option for their clients and suggest this as an option to them (this point has been made to SPA by experienced advisers and by colleagues in Lifelong Learning Networks).

- **SPA hopes, therefore, that when issues connected with advice and guidance are being considered by governments and government agencies, by advisers and their networks and by the producers of guidance material that the option of part-time study is always borne in mind and offered to enquirers as one of the options to be considered.**

11. Transition and support for part-time applicants

Irrespective of which method of part-time study a student is following ('traditional' evening or day release, distance or blended learning, etc.), in taking on part-time study they are entering into a very substantial commitment. It is important that HEIs:

- **Make it very clear to prospective students the extent of the time, effort and commitment needed to follow a part-time programme.**
- **Have in place a range of support arrangements for new students, including courses in time management and study skills, offered at times and in ways which are appropriate to their study programmes (for example, in the evenings, online or at weekends).**
- **Ensure that transition arrangements (for example library visits, tutor meetings, registration, etc.) are in place and are also offered at times and in ways suitable for part-time students.**

Institutions may wish to consider SPA's work on the 'Applicant Experience Strategy'²³ in connection with this area.

12. Part-time study and employers

The relationship of part-time study to employment is of the highest importance. Students frequently undertake part-time study to further their careers and courses may be developed by HE providers in conjunction with companies and organisations. Governments may see the involvement of employers as both ensuring the relevance of higher education courses and providing an important additional source of funding²⁴

There are a range of issues which affect the relationship between HE providers and employers,

²² A note on significant websites is provided in Appendix 7

²³ SPA Applicant Experience Strategy www.spa.ac.uk/resources/applicant-experience-strategy consulted 21 June 2010

²⁴ For example, HEFCE's funding for co-funded student numbers <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/econsoc/employer/funding/provision/> consulted 20 July 2010

including the involvement and interest of the professional bodies, the need for proper quality procedures and protection of academic standards, employers' need for fast responses and courses tailored to the needs of their staff, the possibility of placements and future research links and many other issues. Some employers, such as the NHS, may be essential customers for institutions, with part-time courses being entirely dependent on their demand.

The QAA has considered issues in this area in its recent publication 'Employer-responsive provision survey: A reflective report'²⁵ In the report one of the issues the QAA considers is admission to programmes offered in cooperation with employers. On page 20 they note that 'the responsibility for admissions decisions in employer-responsive provision is sometimes complex, as the employer may be paying for the learning and/or accreditation and may wish to determine individual suitability to take part in the learning.' (section 69) while acknowledging that 'It is the institution that has ultimate responsibility for acceptance onto any award/learning in their name' (section 70). The Confederation for British Industries (CBI), in their 2008 report 'Stepping higher: Workforce development through employer-higher education partnership' also considered this issue, looking at 'how universities can successfully adapt to recognise both employers and learners as clients.'²⁶

This is a complex area and there does not yet appear to be established good practice. We suggest, however, that among other issues HE institutions will wish to consider the following:

- **A clear point of contact for employers when contacting the institution**
- **An established policy, clear and easily accessible and approved by the relevant authorities in the HE institution, on working with employers. This should address issues such as responsibility for admissions, reporting of information about the student to the employer and data protection and be supported by advice from the institution's legal advisor if necessary.**

Work on this area will continue and we would welcome comments and examples of good practice in this area.

13. Further Education

FE colleges are significant providers of part-time opportunities and often have very close links to local employers.

This section will look at these issues and also at the relationship between further and higher education institutions.

SPA is in discussion with the Association of Colleges and this section will be developed further following these discussions.

²⁵ Employer-responsive provision survey: A reflective report. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/employers/effectiveprovision.pdf> consulted 30 July 2010.

²⁶ Stepping higher: Workforce development through employer-higher education partnership, October 2008, page 26, www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/Stepping-Higher.pdf consulted 20 July 2010

APPENDIX 1

SPA Objective 4 2009-2011:

To support good practice in the admission of part-time students through the investigation, development and analysis of an evidence base of practice, including mature students and the linkages with the changing school/college curricula in the UK, vocational qualifications, work-based learning and skills.

APPENDIX 2

Definition of 'Part-Time' students

In the past there may have been a 'traditional' image of a part-time student; employed in industry or the public service and taking evening classes and occasional day release while completing a 'traditional' degree over a longer period. In fact there are now many different 'types' of part-time student and discussion with colleagues across HE indicates that distinctions made between them are often very subtle and may not be relevant in an admissions context.

a) The 'standard' HESA definition (accepted by the UK's four Funding Councils).

This refers to:

- Full-time and sandwich:
'... a full-time course or research study involves the student in an average of at least 21 hours study a week, including private study, for periods of more than 24 weeks per year'
- Part-time:
Includes short full-time, i.e. full-time students whose total length of course is less than or equal to 24 weeks.²⁷

b) The above definition is general and basically defines a 'part-time' student as not being 'full-time'. For admissions purposes it may be helpful to define part-time students further and UUK's November 2006 report 'Part-time students and part-time study in higher education in the UK' includes the following suggestions:²⁸

- Undergraduate students who are studying for a first degree
- 'Other' undergraduate students, studying for another qualification at undergraduate level, including 'short course' students
- Students who are not seeking a qualification.

c) Undergraduate students studying for a first degree are also sometimes differentiated by their mode of study, including:

- Evening and/or day release
- Distance learning (including e-learning, correspondence courses etc)
- Blended learning (mixture of distance-learning and intensive – e.g. weekend – courses)

Admissions colleagues at a number of institutions advise that the mode of study is not significant for admissions purposes and that, in their opinion, all the above should be considered as part-time applicants.

d) The Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance (the Browne Review) recommends that entitlement to support for costs of learning should begin when a student is studying 'at an intensity equivalent to one third of the full-time equivalent - 33%'.²⁹

²⁷ www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/component/option,com_studrec/task,show_file/Itemid,233/mnl,09051/href,FTE.html/ Consulted 22 June 2010

²⁸ UUK – *Part-time students and part-time study in higher education in the UK*: Strand 1, Section 3.10, p.15. www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/parttime_strand1.pdf . Consulted 22 June 2010

²⁹ Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance, Section 5.2, p. 36 <http://hereview.independent.gov.uk/hereview/> Consulted 21 October 2010

e) Two final groups are:

- Short course students; students who are taking courses but not for a qualification (perhaps a course offered in conjunction with their employer)
- ‘Recreational’ students who are taking a short course purely for the purpose of personal interest.

It has become clear that short course study is of value in meeting the ‘upskilling ‘ agenda and is very important for many institutions, while colleagues comment that recreational courses may well be valuable in encouraging students to enter or return to education.

e) There is one further group covered by HESA’s definition of ‘part-time’; students who are repeating modules or particular levels of study. In a sense they form a particular group of ‘continuing’ students and, as such, do not undergo an admission process to re-enter their full time programme.

APPENDIX 3

The possibility of a common information and application system

Full-time undergraduate applicants are able to access the well-established UCAS system, which offers both an information service and a route for applications. By contrast, part-time students do not have such a system and observers sometimes suggest that it might be helpful.³⁰

In 2009 UCAS undertook a Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded project with Linking London Lifelong Learning Network (LLLLN)³¹ looking at both information needs and the possibility of 'centralised' application systems and continues to discuss the issue. Also, during the summer of 2009 UCAS provided a search facility for part-time HE courses (*courses, not vacancies*), to be repeated in 2010, which enabled applicants to make a search for Part-time Courses at the time of Clearing and Confirmation.

Discussion of this gives rise to a number of practical questions:

- Many part-time students begin by taking unit-level 'qualifications', before moving to a full-time programme. The current UCAS system, which is largely based on whole degree courses, would have to change substantially before this could be accommodated
- Part-time students may start at many different times of the year (the current UCAS system has difficulty accommodating the different starting times of nurses, for example)
- How to deal with students who may move between part-time and full-time modes of study
- What would be the value of a system if much part-time study is locally based?
- How would 'part-time' study be defined? Would it include recreational study, distance learning?
- How would such a system would be paid for?

No doubt consideration of these issues will continue and HEIs and other interested parties will be involved in future discussions.

³⁰ In his speech to the UUK Annual Conference on 9 September 2010, David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science in England, commented 'But there are new challenges for UCAS in the future. At the moment part-time students are not part of this system. Can we do more to incorporate them?'

http://nds.coi.gov.uk/content/Detail.aspx?ReleaseID=415386&NewsAreaID=2&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+bis-news+%28BIS+News%29, consulted 14 September 2010

³¹ Shared services feasibility study: Part-time application, admissions and information service for London-based institutions. Prepared by UCAS on behalf of HEFCE. June 2009 (www.hefce.ac.uk/finance/shared/feasibility/reports/FS65.pdf) consulted 17 September 2010.

APPENDIX 4

Characteristics of part-time students

It may be worthwhile considering the following aspects in particular:

- Gender balance
- Family/carer responsibilities?
These two issues may be affected by the significance of female responsibilities for childcare and as carers. Certain courses may also be seen as particularly attractive to a particular gender.
The challenges presented to students of both genders in undertaking part-time higher education will be considerable but may differ
- Employment Circumstances
Including the extent to which the employer will accommodate needs for time off, etc., for study, assignments etc.
- Employment Sponsorship
Including the extent to which the employer will wish to be involved in receiving information on the student's performance, the proportion of the fees with which they are willing to assist, and what involvement they wish to have in the admission process
- Entry Qualifications – and in particular APL (including both APCL and APEL)
- Distance to the place of study.
This will be significant for all part-time students; for example, those attending frequently (on a daily or weekly basis) and those who are at a greater distance and will only attend once a month or two or three times each year.
- Disability
- Socio-economic background
- Age
- First experience of higher education
- Retention

APPENDIX 5

Different UK administrations – and their view of part-time study

All the UK's administrations are committed to enhancing the experience of, and opportunities available to, part-time students, though they may approach the issue in different ways. A particular issue for HE provider institutions is to reconcile the wishes of the governments for enhanced part-time study provision with the realities of funding models which may seem to penalise more flexible provision (for example, statistical returns which show students who take only one 'unit' as having 'discontinued', thereby adversely affecting the HE institution's retention figures).

It may be of general interest to consider some of the features of the different administrations' approach.

- England

A major review of part-time study was undertaken by Professor Christine King, Vice-Chancellor of Staffordshire University, for the then Department of Innovation, University and Skills in 2008. Since then it has continued to be an area of interest in public policy, widely debated by many organisations, including political parties (a list of some of the key reports is given in Appendix 6). This interest continues.

HEFCE actively promotes cooperation with employers through, for example, 'co-funded' provision (www.hefce.ac.uk/econsoc/employer/) which encourages employers to sponsor students by contributing an amount towards the FTE, with HEFCE meeting the remainder. This is *in addition to* paying a student's fees.

HEFCE has considered different funding models, including credit-based funding, but appears to have decided not to pursue this for the moment (www.hefce.ac.uk/faq/tfm.htm)

HEFCE also makes special provision for the funding of widening participation activity for part-time students (www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/fund/1011/postcode.htm)

- Scotland

A unique feature of the Scottish situation for individual students is the place of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs www.ilascotland.org.uk/ILA+Homepage.htm) which enables potential students both to apply for programmes and to access funding at the same time. It is of the view of practitioners in Scotland that the existence of ILAs is of great benefit in encouraging part-time students.

- Northern Ireland

While the Northern Ireland government is supportive of flexible provision and opportunities the specific issue of part-time provision and support for part-time students does not, currently, appear to be a priority.

- Wales

A key feature in Wales is that student funding is per credit, rather than by course, and this seeks to reduce inequalities between full and part-time students as far as funding is concerned.

Part-time study has been the subject of considerable study; particularly significant is the 'Graham Review' of 2006

(http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/graham_report_06?lang=en).

Relations with employers are considered within the heading of 'innovation & engagement'.

APPENDIX 6

Sources of information on part-time study opportunities and useful reports and guidance

Reports

There are many reports, publications and websites dealing with part-time issues, including several which have emerged over the past 2 years. The following is just a small list of some which may be of interest to admissions practitioners; many of them, in turn, have extensive bibliographies and links.

Campaign for Learning, December 2008

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CUCKOO IN THE NEST; Getting beyond the fixation with full-time study by young people

www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/assets/documents/OtherDocuments/HE_Cuckoo_Nest.pdf

Consulted 7 July 2010

Confederation of British Industry

A range of relevant materials including:

Education and Skills Policy Area

www.cbi.org.uk/ndbs/content.nsf/802737aed3e3420580256706005390ae/e83f616f81370ce880256dc60047ede9

Universities & Business: working together in an age of austerity' (speech by Richard Lambert, Director General), June 2010

www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/20100608-cbi-richard-lambert-univ-sheffield-lecture.pdf

Stepping higher: Workforce development through employer-higher education partnership, October 2008

www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/Stepping-Higher.pdf

Consulted 12 July 2010

Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), September 2008

PART-TIME STUDY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/tna+/http://www.dius.gov.uk/policy/documents/part_time_studies_and_he_131008.pdf

Consulted 7 July 2010

Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU), May 2009

Part-time undergraduates in higher education: a literature review

www.hecsu.ac.uk/hecsu.rd/documents/Reports/part_time_undergraduates_in_HE_0509.pdf

Consulted 7 July 2010

Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU), June 2010

FUTURETRACK: PART-TIME STUDENTS; CAREER DECISION-MAKING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF PART-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

www.hecsu.ac.uk/hecsu.rd/documents/Reports/FINAL_HECSU_Student_report_Draft_07-06-10.pdf

Consulted 7 July 2010

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), May 2009

Part-time first degree study – Entry and completion (May 2009/18)

www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_18/

Consulted 7 July 2010

National Student Forum

Annual Report 09

www.nationalstudentforum.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/NSF_annual_report_2009.pdf

Consulted 7 July 2010

Policy Exchange, August 2009

Educating Rita; A model to address inadequate state support for part-time students

www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/Educating_Rita_Final.pdf

Consulted 7 July 2010

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), 2010

- Employer-responsive provision survey: A reflective report (Ref QAA 330 01/10)
www.qaa.ac.uk/employers/effectiveprovision.pdf
- Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education
Section 9: Work-based and placement learning (2007)
www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section9/default.asp
- Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education
Section 10: Admissions to higher education (2006)
www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section10/default.asp

Consulted 9 August 2010

Scottish Executive Social Research, 2006

Looking to Learn: Investigating the Motivations to Learn and the Barriers faces by Adults Wishing to Undertake Part-Time Study

www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/03/09075850/0

Consulted 7 July 2010

Skills Commission, March 2009

Progression through apprenticeships; The final report of the Skills Commission's Inquiry into apprenticeships

[www.policyconnect.org.uk/fckimages/Skills%20Commission%20-%20Progression%20through%20apprenticeships\(1\).pdf](http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/fckimages/Skills%20Commission%20-%20Progression%20through%20apprenticeships(1).pdf)

Consulted 7 July 2010

Universities UK (UUK), October 2006

Part-time students in higher education – supporting higher-level skills and lifelong learning
ISBN 1 84036 138 7

Universities UK (UUK), November 2006

Part-time students and part-time study in higher education in the UK, a major study in three volumes.

www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/parttime_strand1.pdf
www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/parttime_strand2.pdf

www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/parttime_strand3.pdf

Consulted 7 July 2010

Welsh Assembly Government, June 2006

Independent Review of Part-time Higher Education Study in Wales

http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/graham_report_06?lang=en

Consulted 7 July 2010

APPENDIX 7

Information for potential part-time students – national level.

As noted in Section 7, there is currently no national ‘universal’ source of information on part-time opportunities, similar to the ‘UCAS’ listing for full-time undergraduate courses. There are, however, some websites which offer potential students the possibility of searching for part-time courses.

Institutions are encouraged to ensure that information held on them is correct and is as comprehensive as possible.

Significant websites include the following:

- UK Government
www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/DecidingWhereToStudy/DG_4017740
Consulted 7 July 2010
- Hot Courses
www.hotcourses.com/pls/cgi-bin/page_pls_all_homepage?x=16180339&y=&a=0
Consulted 7 July 2010
- Foundation Degrees
<http://fd.ucas.com/CourseSearch/Default.aspx>
Consulted 8 July 2010
- CUKAS and GTTR (*Now UCAS Conservatoires and UTT*)
The CUKAS (www.cukas.ac.uk/) and GTTR (www.gttr.ac.uk/) (both consulted 8 July 2010) admissions schemes include part-time only courses and part-time equivalents to full-time courses, as well as full-time courses
- UCAS – Confirmation & Clearing lists
During 2009 and 2010 UCAS offered a service during the Confirmation and Clearing period in the summer listing part-time undergraduate courses offered by UCAS member institutions. This was a voluntary service, with institutions being offered the opportunity to participate.
- Scotland
 - learndirect Scotland
www.learndirectscotland.com/ and
 - National Learning Opportunities Database
www.ids4partners.com/Learning+providers/
 - ILA Scotland course search
www.ilascotland.org.uk/ILA+Homepage.htmConsulted 8 July 2010

- UCAS Services to other sites and clients

UCAS also provides a service to many of the other websites listed above, collecting data on part-time courses and passing it on to them.

The UCAS Courses Data Team hold a separate database with details of all part-time UG/HE courses available in the UK for all accredited UK UG/HE course providers, not just UCAS members. The Team collect details from all providers in the UK, of part-time undergraduate and HE courses including part-time versions of full-time courses, part-time only courses and part-time distance learning courses (the listings are currently being expanded to take in part-time standalone credit-bearing modules). Selected data is supplied to relevant UCAS sites (part-time course search, foundation degree search) and to clients such as Hotcourses and Proquest (for their subscription-based KnowUK product). Data is also published on UCAS's own product, *Course Discover*, which is available as a subscription-based service to schools and careers offices.

Course data is collected proactively from the institutions, with a main data collection run once a year, but with the option for institutions to provide their data at any time through an online interface.