SPA considerations for Confirmation and Clearing

Updated May 2017

This document is intended to provide some key proactive considerations for Confirmation, Adjustment and Clearing and to support staff involved in a strategic or operational capacity. It also includes a summary table of variable numbers to assist you with planning against target and a checklist of the key overarching considerations in preparation for the Confirmation and Clearing period. Please circulate and discuss these considerations with staff involved in any aspect of Confirmation and Clearing activity.

If you wish to discuss any of these considerations in greater detail, or provide any feedback on this document, please get in touch via enquiries@spa.ac.uk or 01242 544891.

Planning ahead

External changes

- ☐ Factor in and effectively communicate to all relevant staff/departments any external changes to policy and legislation impacting your institution, including:
  - ☐ UCAS products and services:
    - ☐ The new UCAS Tariff has been introduced for courses starting from September 2017 and will be used in HESA data returns for the 2017-18 entry cohort. The change in the Tariff can affect entry requirements, decision-making (particularly if systems make any automated calculations of Tariff points), qualification ‘equivalence’, planning and student records-related activity. HE providers should consider incorporating reference to this in any training for Confirmation and Clearing activity (particularly for any outward-facing teams) even if it is not part of entry requirements or decision-making, as well as factoring the changes in to any HESA return planning. The UCAS Providers website gives a list of key activities to complete for providers who use the Tariff in any way as well as many other useful resources.
    - ☐ The Direct Contact Service (DCS, formerly the precision marketing data service) has been extended this year to cover Extra as well as Clearing, enabling providers to proactively contact potentially suitable unplaced applicants. Any recommendations in this document, particularly around communications and consumer protection requirements, should be applied to DCS activities.
    - ☐ Eligible applicants will again be allowed to add a Clearing choice on UCAS Track from 15:00 on Thursday 17 August.
    - ☐ Any changes to the delivery of results via the Awarding Body Linkage (ABL), including new exam levels (e.g. reformed A Levels), new grading structures (e.g. Access to HE Diploma) and new fields (e.g. science practical grade in England).
  - ☐ The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) advice for HE providers on consumer protection law (March 2015) is UK-wide. It includes advice on providing terms and conditions of the contract to potential new applicants offered places through Clearing or

Adjustment and complying with specific consumer law requirements such as informing those applicants of their right to change their mind up to 14 days after the making of the contract.

- ☐ Clarify in advance with legal advisers and/or senior managers in your institution when the contract is formed in Clearing, considering the specific contracting process adopted by your institution. Make this clarification clear to admissions, student recruitment and other relevant staff; temporary employees (including students) on the Clearing phone lines, enquiry points; and of course, to applicants being offered a place.
- ☐ The making of verbal offers and the issue of when precisely the contract is formed is a complex legal area and one on which your institution may wish to consider taking legal advice in the context of your institution's specific processes and procedures. Any scripts used when dealing with calls from applicants in Clearing or Adjustment or calls to applicants in DCS should accurately reflect the institution's contract and consumer law obligations.
- ☐ For the UCAS view of the applicant contract in Clearing, see the UCAS flyer. UCAS' recommended approach is that the applicant contract is formed at the point the provider accepts the applicant in Track. This makes it clear to all parties when the 14 day 'cooling off' period begins, and maintains the integrity of the information held in UCAS' systems.

☐ Academic and vocational qualifications in the UK are in the process of significant reform. Awareness raising of this should be included in any training, particularly for staff from outside admissions, to assist with handling enquiries and decision-making. Any changes to grading structures (such as reformed GCSEs in England, or the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate) should be reflected in entry requirements and any systems where grades can be automatically populated or selected from a drop-down list, such as online application forms, or Clearing systems used by telephone operators.

Internal planning strategies and targets

☐ Review your historic strategy for setting admissions targets, ensuring any trends inferred from previous years are still valid, not only at an institution level, but also for individual courses. If your admissions targets have additional numbers factored in for anticipated drop out between unconditional firm (UF) status and student number returns to HESA, don't forget to review those as well.

☐ Work out all the variables affecting your targets, how you calculate conversion rates and how you report how many (predicted) places are remaining, or any (expected) over-recruitment. The table at the end of this document summarises the common variables anyone managing their numbers at Confirmation will need to factor in, to ensure their estimates of final numbers of new students are as accurate as possible. Failure to account for these variables at Confirmation will result in a course going into Clearing with an inaccurate number of places to offer, leading to otherwise avoidable over-recruitment or under-recruitment. It is vital the entire institution works from one, agreed formula for each course, rather than risk central and devolved areas calculating different targets, acceptances and vacancies.

☐ Predicting conversion from insurance may be particularly complicated, especially where there is greater competition amongst HE providers. Carefully review historical conversion rates on a course-by-course basis, but pay close attention to current competitors, especially if there is a new competitor your insurance places have firmly accepted. If there are courses particularly at risk of over-recruiting or if disproportionately high numbers of insurance are firm at one HE provider, compare predicted grades against competitors' offers to anticipate conversion. Be clear in your internal reporting how much uncertainty may lie in your predicted conversion rate (e.g. if you suspect a competitor may take more of their firms with lower grades than in previous years, suggest an upper and lower conversion range for senior management to consider).

- ☐ Even if you are concerned about over-recruiting, it is likely you will still be in a position where you are considering 'near-misses' to fill some courses, or making change of course (UCC) offers to suitably qualified applicants. Have comprehensive criteria for choosing between potentially large numbers of near-misses for a few places. You may well need a graduated scale to cope with different scenarios and for fine differentiation you may well need to consider factors additional to the results themselves. Given the limited time, such criteria will need to be simple and quick to apply and may need to be flexible enough to adjust if numbers are reallocated to different courses.

- ☐ If you are planning on taking applicants through Adjustment or Clearing but you also have large numbers of near-misses to consider, set definite numbers of new applicants you plan to take and factor those into your criteria for considering near-misses. Decide whether to operate separate targets for different controlled/capped and uncapped groups.

- ☐ Gain a full understanding of the financial situation, working closely with your finance and planning staff to envisage different possible scenarios and their implications. Senior managers will need to consider a tolerance of acceptability for any overshoot or undershoot of your agreed target, but all admissions staff, both in the centre and devolved, would benefit from appreciating the different financial factors.

- ☐ Ensure that non-financial capacity restrictions, such as accommodation numbers, teaching provision and estate limitations are considered. In addition, if any of these services have separate deadlines (e.g. accommodation application deadlines), these should be coordinated with admissions wherever possible, particularly if such processes are actioned only after an applicant becomes UF. Remember that applicants will not be able to refer themselves to your institution through UCAS Track until 15:00 on Thursday 17 August.

Policies and procedures

- ☐ Consider who is needed on the procedural, technical, support, academic and managerial sides to implement your plans. Brief them on what is required, check that they are confident they can deliver with the resources they have and make them aware of how their role fits into the wider picture for the institution and applicant experience. Bear in mind that it may be necessary to involve senior management if any aspect of the plan is at risk.

- ☐ Conduct a thorough risk assessment of all Confirmation and Clearing related activity well in advance and have effective contingency plans in place so they can be implemented promptly if needed.

- ☐ Ensure processes leading to an admissions decision are clear, consistent and auditable, and accurately record decisions, to reduce the chances of mistakes occurring. Consider how you will respond effectively if mistakes do occur. SPA's good practice guide on managing mistakes offers a number of recommendations that can be applied to Confirmation and Clearing processes.

- ☐ If you have a policy or procedures for contextualised admissions, ensure there is clear guidance on how these can be applied at Confirmation (e.g. for considering near-misses) Clearing and Adjustment in a consistent and timely way.

- ☐ Always keep in mind that equality considerations applied throughout the main admissions cycle must continue to be applied consistently during Confirmation and Clearing. This may be particularly pertinent when considering disability support arrangements and contextualised admissions. Undertake an equality impact assessment (EIA) of your Confirmation and Clearing activity, to ensure that any policies, processes or operations do not inadvertently discriminate against any protected group. If in doubt, involve relevant equality/student support staff in assessing procedures and ensure all staff are appropriately trained and considerate.

- ☐ Ensure that your process for dealing with mitigating/extenuating circumstances is clearly defined and that applications that are 'flagged' during the admissions cycle are given appropriate consideration by suitable member(s) of staff at Confirmation. Processes for dealing with extenuating/mitigating circumstances may differ for main cycle and Clearing applicants, and this should be clearly documented to allow staff to deal with queries and applications fairly and appropriately.

- ☐ Admissions software should be thoroughly tested in advance and any protocols for transmissions to and from UCAS checked. Ensure your software is updated with the most recent UCAS ABL codes, particularly for reformed qualifications where there may be multiple versions of the 'same' qualification depending on the region.

- ☐ Ensure all inter-related IT systems adhere to the results embargo. Be aware of, and fully understand the scope of, any agreed embargos on when information (e.g. examination results; confirmation of a place) may be communicated to applicants and ensure all communication channels, including automated ones, respect such agreements. Be mindful that some channels may be controlled by staff outside of admissions (e.g. enrolment; accommodation; student experience/support; IT; academic departments; CRM) and that communication on a wide range of topics may be indirectly linked to the embargo. If processes such as accommodation allocation, access to the student portal or financial support arrangements are actioned only after an applicant becomes UF, these need to respect an embargo even if the process outcomes do not specifically refer to results.

- ☐ Accurately scope out the number of available incoming and outgoing telephone lines (and subsequently, the number of possible operators) with your IT/telephony teams.

- ☐ You may decide to have separate phone numbers for Clearing and Confirmation, to ensure that applicants are directed to relevant staff and to prevent Clearing enquiries blocking important Confirmation calls.

- ☐ If you are planning on moving a high volume of information electronically (e.g. bulk emails; applicant portal; text messages), check with your IT/telephony staff that the technology can cope with high peaks in demand.

- ☐ Consider inter-related policies and procedures. For example, if action taken at Confirmation may give grounds for applicant complaint or appeal, ensure staff are aware of your complaints and appeals policy, so that they can take it into account before acting and can correctly advise applicants of their rights if asked. If your policy has a restricted number of staff authorised to consider appeals and you anticipate increased requests for appeal at Confirmation, plan this into staff times and other duties, ensuring staff are fully aware of their commitments. If the policy permits authority to be delegated, train additional staff in preparation.

- ☐ Other policies and services, which may be external to admissions processes, may be indirectly affected by your Confirmation and Clearing plan (e.g. accommodation; equality and diversity; teaching facilities; bursaries).

Communications

Internal

- ☐ Circulate key dates and times to all staff, central and devolved, who may be involved in the Confirmation and Clearing process:

    - ☐ Remember some staff may have their leave and working hours managed by line managers who are not involved in admissions.
    - ☐ You may find it useful to have a contacts list or 'staff on duty' rota for staff to use.
    - ☐ Consider all possible areas that may impact on the Confirmation and Clearing period, even if they are not involved in admissions (e.g. if you are planning on holding an open day you won't want someone else running a conference in your best facilities, but you may want additional cleaners).

- ☐ Consider who is likely to encounter enquiries and be mindful that this will include staff and/or volunteers (including student ambassadors) who are not normally involved in admissions.

    - ☐ Brief them on what you anticipate will be standard enquiries and the institution's key messages over this period. You may wish to provide them with a reference list of possible topics and appropriate answers.
    - ☐ Ensure they are aware of the limits of any information and advice they give (it is important to ensure they don't make the mistake of speculating) and that they know which experts to refer queries to that are not covered by pre-informed responses.
    - ☐ Ensure all staff are clear on whether they have the authority to make Clearing offers or convey Confirmation decisions over the phone, and that those without such authority are careful not to use language that may imply an offer is being made, mindful of consumer protection issues.
    - ☐ A follow-up briefing may be needed as the admissions picture on acceptances develops. You will need to consider the best way to disseminate important updates, especially during peak periods.
    - ☐ Enquiries during Confirmation and Clearing can come through unexpected channels, and therefore you may also wish to consider an 'all-staff' key messages briefing sheet or contact list by enquiry types for wider circulation.

- ☐ Consider the impact that the increased number of calls to your Confirmation and/or Clearing helpline(s) will have and ensure that any restrictions to 'business-as-usual' activities are communicated effectively. Think about how operating your helpline at maximum capacity will impact not only Confirmation and Clearing related communication activities (e.g. calling other HE providers to discuss Confirmation, any conversion activities that may be taking place, or chasing outstanding results) but also how unrelated departments/operations will be affected. You may need to involve senior managers to emphasise the order of priority for any telephone activities.

External

Online information

- ☐ Applicants will be able to view Clearing vacancy information on UCAS from 5 July. Ensure that vacancy listings on the UCAS website are accurate for each of your courses and that these are updated when the status changes. Remember that clearly publishing that you do not have vacancies is just as important as listing courses that do.

- ☐ Putting as much information as possible on your website could prove a valuable tool in managing expectations and controlling phone and email traffic. However, be careful not to allow volume of information to obscure important messages and think carefully about the layout and accessibility of the information you put up.

- ☐ Put measures in place to ensure information is consistent across different web pages (whether central pages, course/department pages, or pages on external sites you provide information for) and that they can all be updated promptly. This is particularly important for entry requirements and vacancy information during this period. HE providers may wish to have a separate webpage for Clearing entry requirements, vacancies and any other pertinent information.

- ☐ Ensure that information published on your website and via other communication channels, e.g. social media, is compliant with consumer protection legislation.

- ☐ In addition to your Confirmation and Clearing helpline number(s), publish your opening hours for this period for all relevant teams. Applicants may not be aware if you are open earlier or later than standard.

Applicants

- ☐ Consider how you will communicate with applicants and inform them of as much as possible in advance, including any dedicated communication channels. This will reduce the number of queries when results are published, allow you to channel queries to relevant staff and will make applicants calling prepared for possible delays in getting through.

- ☐ If you are making change of course (UCC) offers to applicants, you will need to ensure that the change is communicated effectively. Use clear and targeted communications to advise UCC offer holders of the associated UCAS procedures they will need to follow (e.g. logging in to Track to accept or decline), the wider impact of any course change, particularly when changing from a year one to a foundation year route (e.g. an additional year of study, additional tuition fees, progression route options) and to give any relevant course-specific information. Any inter-linked systems should be tested to make sure they can cope with changes of course to avoid confusion and potential complaints (e.g. if you change a course in your admissions system, is this also replicated in your CRM system to avoid emails going out for the incorrect course?).

- ☐ Ensure that course-specific information and guidance is sent to applicants who are made Clearing offer, particularly if this is to an alternative course.

- ☐ Ensure everyone handling calls is aware of the availability of UCAS systems so that applicants receive consistent information, particularly on the availability of Track services

Schools, colleges and other advisers

- ☐ Your marketing and recruitment, widening participation or schools and colleges liaison staff will know who your partner institutions and key feeder schools and colleges are, and you will probably already have good links established.

  - ☐ Inform key contacts of Clearing vacancies (or lack of) at your institution, as well as your opening hours, so that they can provide realistic advice to their students when results are published. You may wish to remind them to encourage use of UCAS Track (including Advisor track) rather than phone in, and give an assurance that the information on Track will be accurate so there will be no need to confirm with the institution directly.
  - ☐ You may wish to give key contacts a separate confidential number to use in exceptional circumstances, so that they know they can get through to someone if necessary. Make sure you clearly define the type of query such a number should be used for and that it is appropriately staffed.

Press and media

- ☐ Brief your media or external communications team and agree the public-facing key messages they will convey, including any social media campaigns/activity. Your media team may decide to pre-empt queries and send a media release in advance.

- ☐ This may be a chance to put out a positive message about your institution, and there may be opportunities for press activity in advance of the peak Confirmation and Clearing period.

- ☐ Keep in mind that the press may call several different people, so ensure they are redirected to the appropriate internal media expert. The press may even pose as applicants, but providing your processes and advice are fair and consistent you shouldn't worry about such 'mystery shoppers' and staff should not to try and second-guess if a call is genuine.

Other HE providers

- ☐ A request to update your confidential contacts will be sent to your UCAS Correspondent and UCAS will use those details to send any urgent messages and updates during the Confirmation and Clearing period. Plan who you will name at your institution and make sure they are available to respond to calls, kept up-to-date and have the appropriate discretion to act on individual outstanding decisions. The confidential contacts list should only be used by UCAS and member HE providers and it is important such calls are handled by someone with the knowledge and authority to respond.

- ☐ Ideally, all HE providers will process Confirmation decisions as quickly as possible. This will not only allow individual HE providers to monitor numbers but will help other HE providers promptly identify their conversion from insurance.

- ☐ If you spot many insurance applicants who are still conditional firm (CF) at another HE provider, call the provider using the UCAS confidential contacts list to find out the situation. Even if they can't send a decision to UCAS straight away, they should be able to give you a clearer picture of what is happening so you can factor it into your planning.

- ☐ Have a policy to accurately inform admissions staff in other HE providers of your situation if asked and to respect the confidentiality of any report they may give to you. Adherence to this policy will prevent ad hoc handling of such discussions and therefore mitigate the risk of any collusion between HE providers.

Staffing and training

- ☐ Good and visible leadership will be key to maintaining confidence and getting prompt action.

- ☐ Ultimately, senior management must be prepared to make any difficult decisions that fall outside of policy or accepted practice. Ensure they are apprised of the situation well in advance and that they are familiar with your normal processes and relevant UCAS procedures and guidance, so that there is ample time to consider any policy, legislative or contractual implications. They will assess the short-term and long-term impact and will base their decision on the best interests of the institution, the sector and the applicants.

- ☐ Be very clear on the chain of command and who is responsible for each part of the plan for Confirmation and Clearing. If there is an unavoidable situation where someone will not be available for any part of the Confirmation and Clearing period, their responsibilities must be properly delegated in advance.

- ☐ Identify your best experts and have them champion specific areas of concern during training, for example consumer protection, qualification reform or the new UCAS Tariff.

- ☐ Identify experts/supervisors within your Clearing operation, and have clear ways for your staff to contact them promptly.

- ☐ You should have a formal group in place to oversee the planning, target monitoring and activity for Confirmation and Clearing. This may be an existing admissions committee, but you should carefully consider which additional staff should be involved. Bear in mind administrative and academic staff supporting the transition of new students. You may also wish to involve any external representatives involved in the process. If your overall student number targets include applicants recruited in partner colleges, those partners should be included.

- ☐ Forecast staffing levels using historical data (e.g. call volumes/timings, comparing previous vacancy numbers) and moderate against predictors of future demand to ensure you have adequate staff in place to cover peak periods. Ensure that staff are aware of their scheduled working hours and have break periods incorporated into the rota that are adequately covered.

- ☐ Ensure all staff are fully briefed on the issues, key messages, and your processes and procedures. This should include information on the rationale for any changes, particularly if strategies differ significantly to previous years, to enable staff to feel well informed, prepare for any additional training and understand the wider context for the changes.

- ☐ Inform staff in advance of any training requirements, and ensure that this is appropriate and relevant to their prior experience and new duties/responsibilities. If additional institution staff or temporary staff or students/alumni are being drafted in for the Confirmation and Clearing period, the training they require may differ significantly from that of experienced admissions staff.

- ☐ Even experienced staff will need an update on the situation, key messages and changes since the previous cycle. During the peak period, this may include both regular and impromptu update briefings to ensure all staff are informed of key changes (e.g. courses that have closed, accommodation that is full or an overall recruitment picture). Ensure all staff are aware of when and how to access updates.

- ☐ Ensure that all staff are briefed on consumer protection and admissions at Clearing and Adjustment, including when the contract is formed.

- ☐ Don't allow staff to feel overwhelmed or rush into poorly-informed reactions to events; gather all appropriate information and consider all rational alternatives before deciding a course of action.

- ☐ If you plan to bring in external trainers, book them early and be prepared with a range of possible dates. Ensure they are clearly briefed on your situation, strategy and key messages.

- ☐ Remember UCAS will **not** correct or amend any Confirmation decisions sent during the periods when Track is frozen prior to publication of A level results. It is therefore imperative that all staff involved are trained and aware of the need for accuracy. If the roles of decision-makers and staff inputting decisions electronically are separate, then you should consider how these functions interact and what mechanisms are in place to empower one to query the other.

- ☐ Some HE providers may decide not to go into Clearing. However, even if you have no published vacancies you may well still receive many calls. Some HE providers may decide to go into Clearing in only a very limited capacity (e.g. only for 'rest of UK' or international applicants) and this may also generate calls, particularly if external sites (e.g. UCAS; newspaper vacancy lists) cannot display the detailed vacancy criteria. Ensure you have staff available and trained to handle these queries sensitively.

- ☐ Ensure that your primary UCAS correspondent and nominated contact have completed the UCAS zero breach training module.

Data and security

Keep data secure and up-to-date

- ☐ When ABL results are received, it will be essential to have a senior manager, or someone with delegated authority, on hand to assess the actual situation in relation to planned forecasts and make a prompt executive decision if required.

- ☐ Decisions should be entered and transmitted to UCAS as soon as possible. This will keep your admissions reports up-to-date and will maximise the time available before the results publication date to concentrate on near-misses and target planning.

- ☐ Keep track of unconfirmed offers and distinguish between near-misses for whom you have results but are still under consideration and those with results outstanding. Holding on to applications for longer than is necessary will create enquiries from applicants, advisers and other HE providers.

- ☐ Ensure your admissions statistics and figures are updated regularly, preferably in real time, so that you are always basing action on accurate data.

- ☐ Have one set of data that all staff work from and agree how often it will be updated. If the master data set is to be compiled from different areas, set a standard template for how it must be collected and recorded. A single, consistent record that notes the time and date of data collection will reduce the risk of error and remove the chance of contradictory figures between teams.

- ☐ Ensure staff are aware of your institution's data strategy and data protection policy to keep data and information safe. Also consider the impact and security of any data that is displayed for staff information (e.g. countdowns of places available), particularly if there are visitors or media personnel in and around the buildings where Confirmation and Clearing activity is taking place.

- ☐ Talk to your IT manager about the security of your data transactions and communications with UCAS and ensure that your IT systems and protocols are protected from cyberattacks such as denial of service. Consider what mitigation you have in place in the event of such a major interruption, either internally or externally and ensure that this is factored into your contingency planning.

Missing results and appeals

- ☐ You must wait until **31 August** for missing results if the applicant could still be on track to meet their conditions (e.g. offer of 120 tariff points in 3 A levels with results of BC and one outstanding grade). However, if the partial results fall short of specific requirements, making it impossible to meet the conditions of the offer, it is permissible to reject applicants (e.g. offer of BBB at A Level with results of BC and one outstanding grade).

- ☐ You may wish to have staff chasing missing results during the Confirmation and Clearing period. Remember that not all applicants will know which of their results are outstanding and whether they can or should have come through the ABL, so may not proactively submit missing results.

- ☐ Chase missing results ahead of your main Confirmation period for all qualifications you know should already have been published (BTECs and IB results tend to be released ahead of both Highers and A levels)

- ☐ Keep track of any offers based on qualifications released after your main Confirmation period. This includes GCSEs and some European qualifications. If the qualification in question is not part of the UCAS ABL process, send a reminder to the applicants requesting they send results directly as soon as they have them and to inform you of any delays.

- ☐ Ensure that your policies and procedures for dealing with remarks and results appeals are robust and transparent. Confirmation decisions will in many cases have been processed prior to a remark request or result, and it is therefore important that applicants are clear if your institution will consider successful remarks and if a deadline for reconsideration applies.

Future cycles

- ☐ Decisions made this year may impact on next year. This may be direct (e.g. large number of deferrals) or indirect (e.g. rejecting high numbers from a good 'feeder' school). Keep a note of this at the time. Seemingly small actions aren't always remembered at an end-of-cycle review, so keeping a log as you go will improve planning next year, enhancing the quality of your service and your institution's reputation.

- ☐ Unexpected or difficult situations may have arisen and you should be prepared to factor them in next year (e.g. changes to policy or working methods) to allow your institution to take a more proactive approach.

- ☐ Keep a list of lessons learned, and wherever possible gather feedback from those involved operationally and strategically.

- ☐ Consider how any forthcoming external changes may impact on your policies and processes, particularly if additional time or resource may be needed for planning or training next year (e.g. qualification reforms, the Higher Education and Research Act, Teaching Excellence Framework changes).

Further advice and support

- ☐ SPA will be happy to discuss any issues of fair admissions around Confirmation, Adjustment and Clearing.

- ☐ Your UCAS Relationship Manager or the UCAS HEP Team will be available to answer HEP queries on individual applicants or on UCAS processes and regulations.

- ☐ Colleagues in other HE providers may be willing to share advice.

    - ☐ Existing networks, such as the Academic Registrar's Council - Admissions Practitioners' Group, the GuildHE Admissions Network, or mission group forums should provide useful contacts.
    - ☐ If you predominantly recruit from the local area you may wish to establish an informal network with your opposite numbers at neighbouring universities and colleges.
    - ☐ Alternatively, you can use the UCAS confidential contacts list. However, given how busy it is likely to be, use new contacts prudently during this period.

SPA

Tel: 01242 544891
Web: www.spa.ac.uk
Email: enquiries@spa.ac.uk
Twitter: @SPA_Admissions

Key considerations checklist for Confirmation and Clearing

Planning ahead

Have you:

- ☐ Factored any external policy changes in to your Confirmation and Clearing planning, training and operations (e.g. the new UCAS Tariff, CMA guidelines, qualification reform)?
- ☐ Reviewed and confirmed your admissions targets strategy, including your definitive number of new applicants through Clearing and/or Adjustment and any restrictions (e.g. financial, accommodation)?
- ☐ Reviewed and confirmed your near miss/course change strategies?
- ☐ Taken in to account all key policies that still apply and can affect Confirmation and Clearing planning and activity (e.g. complaints and appeals, contextualised admissions, equality and diversity, accommodation)?
- ☐ Produced clear, consistent and auditable processes for all Confirmation and Clearing activities, including scenario planning for contingencies?
- ☐ Undertaken a full risk assessment and equality impact assessment?
- ☐ Considered and liaised with all staff who will need to be involved procedurally, technically, academically and managerially?
- ☐ Thoroughly tested all admissions software?
- ☐ Checked that your technology can cope with high peaks in demand (IT and phones)?
- ☐ Confirmed and tested the number of available incoming and outgoing telephone lines?
- ☐ Ensured CRM/IT systems can adhere to the results embargo (including any interrelated systems or campaigns), that the relevant staff members have completed the UCAS zero breach training module, returned and fully understood the embargo agreement?

Communications

Have you:

- ☐ Circulated key dates to all staff involved in any activity?
- ☐ Briefed staff on anticipated standard enquiries, the limits of any information that they can give and when they have authority to make Clearing offers?
- ☐ Provided key messages and/or a clear contact list/escalation route for staff receiving enquiries outside of admissions related activities?
- ☐ Considered and documented your applicant communication plan, taking in to account any non-standard scenarios (e.g. change of course offers)?
- ☐ Updated your Clearing vacancies and entry requirements on ucas.com, institutional webpages and any other sources of vacancy information?
- ☐ Informed key internal and external contacts of Clearing vacancies and any other pertinent information?
- ☐ Confirmed and communicated your opening hours internally and externally?
- ☐ Briefed your media and external communications team on key messages and any preferred campaigns/activities?
- ☐ Updated the UCAS confidential correspondents list?
- ☐ Confirmed what information can be shared with other HE providers if needed?

Staffing and training

Have you:

- ☐ Ensured that senior managers are briefed and available for difficult/out of scope decision making?
- ☐ Established a clear chain of command and escalation process?
- ☐ Identified best experts for both internal and external policies/processes and have them ready to champion good practice?
- ☐ Set up your planning/target monitoring group to oversee numbers against targets?
- ☐ Created a central source of numbers information and briefed staff on how and where to access this?
- ☐ Set suitable staffing levels?
- ☐ Provided relevant and appropriate training to all staff involved?
- ☐ Defined a process for disseminating important information/updates and informed your staff of this?
- ☐ Completed the UCAS zero breach training module?

Data and security

Have you:

- ☐ Created a central source of data to monitor and track numbers?
- ☐ Ensured that data protection policies are adhered to and staff are well informed?
- ☐ Undertaken sufficient and rigorous contingency/emergency planning?
- ☐ Chased any early results (e.g. IB and BTEC) prior to the main Confirmation and Clearing period?
- ☐ Established your strategy for dealing with missing results?
- ☐ Confirmed your remarks and appeals processes?

Future cycles

Have you:

- ☐ Gathered and collated feedback from staff involved?
- ☐ Documented lessons-learned to use in future cycle planning?

Associated SPA guidance:

- ☐ Planning and managing admissions
- ☐ Admissions policies
- ☐ Equality
- ☐ Managing mistakes
- ☐ Applicant complaints and appeals
- ☐ Consumer protection issues
- ☐ Competition law

Summary table of variable numbers for planning against targets

Target	Variables to target				Agreed Final Target
	adjustment after own students' summer resits	inflation for potential UF drop-out pre-enrolment	inflation for potential student drop-out pre-HESA return	Target reallocation to/from other courses	
	(actual/predicted) (+/-)			(+/-)	
a	b	c	d	e	f=sum(a,b,c,d,e)

N.B. If you are operating different targets (e.g. based on external controls/ exemptions/ fee status/ funding) ensure all separate planning tables are synchronised. Ensure target and actual numbers are not duplicated and ensure if numbers move between target groupings (*e.g. CF with BBB offer gets ABB; overseas applicant gets reclassified as EU; applicant changes from Nursing to Biology*) they are both deducted from and added to the relevant tables as appropriate.

variables to new intake numbers											Firm numbers meeting requirements
UFs deferred from previous year	UFs from current cycle	CFs meeting/ exceeding conditions	CIs meeting/ exceeding conditions rejected by CF	UIs likely to convert to UF (based on historical trends and/or in-depth analysis of CF)	CFs with results outstanding (expected to convert)	Additional students progressing internally from foundation/ year 0	Additional students progressing from partner institution (still to RPA)		Expected loss in Adjustment	Expected loss from release into Clearing	
		(CFUF)	(CIUF)								
h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o		q	r	s=sum(h,i,j,k,l,m,n,o) - sum(q,r)

Contingency numbers		Final pre-Clearing confirmed numbers		Projected Clearing/Adjustment vacancies (or overshoot)
near-miss CFs	near-miss CFs from other courses to consider as alternatives			
t	u	v=s+%t+%u		x=f-v

Supporting Professionalism in Admissions