

# Strategic Consultancy

## Case Study

### Institution

University of East Anglia (UEA) Health Sciences Programmes

### Project title

Inclusivity review of student recruitment and admissions procedures and practices

### Background/Context

Through the Office for Students returns mechanism, UEA identified specific gaps in its recruitment of Black, Asian Minority Ethnic students, students from Polar 4 Q1 backgrounds and mature students. This was most often due to lower interview scores attained during the admission and recruitment process.

Advance HE was commissioned to undertake a two-phase review of the whole application cycle, from application stage through to issuing an offer, to better understand what the key barriers were in terms of inclusivity and what was impacting the difference in interview experiences.

### Solution

Advance HE used a mixed methods approach across both phases. Interviews, focus groups, and observations were used to gather current students, applicants and staff experiences and perceptions of UEA admissions and recruitment practices to health sciences courses.

Individual interviews with staff from the admissions team, staff from widening participation and Health Sciences academic staff were undertaken in phase one. After a rigorous and robust exploration of the literature, open-ended interview questions were designed to elicit responses about staff experiences and perceptions of admissions and recruitment practices. Concurrently in Phase one, focus groups with current UEA health sciences students, who had experienced the recruitment process, were undertaken. Advance HE researchers were able to design comprehensive and targeted topic guides to elicit responses about students' experiences and perceptions of admissions and recruitment practices.

Phase Two of the project gathered the experiences of applicants, whether successful or not, in applying to health sciences programmes to better understand their motivation in applying to UEA, the support in place prior to interview, during interview and after interview, as well as applicant experiences of awaiting an interview outcome. The Advance HE Insights team was also keen to collect applicants' views on the interview questions, as well as improvements to the entirety of the admissions and recruitment process. In addition to focus groups, Advance HE researchers attended applicant interviews across different programmes to observe the interview environment, and to present findings and recommendations into how the interview setting could be improved to enhance inclusivity.

## Outcomes

The findings from the in-depth research in both phases enabled Advance HE to offer a number of observations and recommendations to assist UEA in enhancing its admissions and recruitment processes.

Although there were multiple areas of excellence, Phase one findings raised key areas for enhancement within admissions and recruitment such as staff engagement, interview mode and delivery, communication, staff training, data monitoring and representation. Advance HE produced a concrete and robust set of recommendations to enable UEA teams to enhance and improve on practices. UEA teams implemented a plan to act on these, including reviewing applicant interview questions, considerations of interview mode and delivery and increased communication with students.

Phase two raised further areas for focus such as interview mode and delivery, communication, and staff training but this time impacting applicants in general, rather than current students. Again, Advance HE offered recommendations to address these and UEA took them on board with its own action plan. These encompassed all concerns and included exploring ways to reduce waiting times for interviews; providing information on structure of the interview process, including possible question types; and reviewing interview training for staff to ensure knowledge was gained about building rapport with applicants and implementing compassionate interviewing.

Advance HE continues to work closely with the university to review the implementation of the recommendations.

***Head of Outreach at UEA Scott Knight said: “The research conducted by Advance HE was thorough, student focused and provided actionable insights for us to take forward as an institution. The team have taken time to understand us as an institution and the challenges we face, and recommended methodologies to meet our research needs in our context.***

***“We have always felt we are receiving valuable expertise from the research team at Advance HE and would recommend them for other institutions looking create institutional change through student experience.”***