

Admission Forums

4.28 Section 85A of the SSFA 1998 requires all local authorities to establish an Admission Forum. Admission Forums provide a vehicle for admission authorities and other key interested parties to discuss the effectiveness of local admission arrangements, consider how to deal with difficult admission issues and advise admission authorities on ways in which their arrangements can be improved. Their main focus is to consider the fairness of arrangements in their local context. Admission authorities of all maintained schools and Academies, when exercising their functions, **must** have regard to any advice offered by the Forum. Local authorities may establish a joint forum with one or more other local authorities to consider and advise on admissions in more than one authority area.

Membership of Forums

- 4.29 It is important that Admission Forums reflect the needs of their local community. The membership of Forums is set out in the Local Authority Reports Regulations¹ and their membership **must** reflect the types of schools in the locality: a representative from each faith group represented by schools in the area; parent and community representatives; up to two local authority representatives (as the admission authority for community and voluntary controlled schools); local employers and; other representatives, which could, for example, include service personnel, and Choice Advisers.
- 4.30 The membership of an Admission Forum **must not** exceed 20. The local authority will report to the Schools Adjudicator on the membership of the Admission Forum as set out in paragraph 4.9(d)(i). The Schools Adjudicator **should** refer matters concerning membership and the prescribed maximum limit of an Admissions Forum to the Secretary of State where they do not comply with paragraphs 4.29 and 4.30.

Statutory role of Admission Forums

- 4.31 Admission Forums have a key role in ensuring a fair admissions system that promotes social equity and **must**, under section 84 of the SSFA 1998, act in accordance with this Code. Part of their role is to advise local authorities and admission authorities on matters relating to school admissions – any advice that they give **must** then be made available to any person with an interest². Admission Forums **must**:
- a) consider how well existing and proposed admission arrangements serve the interests of children and parents within the area of the local authority;
 - b) promote agreement on admission issues;

¹ Regulation 8 of the Local Authority Reports Regulations.

² Regulation 16 of the Local Authority Reports Regulations.

- c) review the comprehensiveness, effectiveness within the local context, and accessibility of advice and guidance for parents by the local authority, both through the published composite prospectus (see Appendix 4) and the delivery of Choice Advice (see Appendix 5) within the area of the Forum;
- d) consider the effectiveness of the authority's proposed co-ordinated admission arrangements, and advise on whether the authority's proposed co-ordinated admission arrangements differ substantially from the previous year;
- e) consider the means by which admissions processes might be improved and how actual admissions relate to the admission numbers published;
- f) monitor the admission of children who arrive in the authority's area outside a normal admission round with a view to promoting arrangements for the fair distribution of such children among local schools, taking account of any preference expressed in accordance with arrangements made under section 86(1) of the SSFA 1998 and in accordance with this Code (see Chapter 3);
- g) promote the arrangements for children with special educational needs, children in care and children who have been excluded from school;
- h) monitor the effectiveness of local authority Fair Access Protocols (see Chapter 3); and
- i) consider any other admissions issues that arise.

Ensuring fair access

4.32 In discharging these responsibilities, an Admission Forum **should**:

- a) refer an objection to the Schools Adjudicator where either it identifies admissions policy, practice or oversubscription criteria of a school that may be unfair, unlawful or that contravene the mandatory provisions of this Code, or where its advice has been disregarded by admission authorities; and
- b) review the impact of local admissions policies on achieving fair access.

Reports on effectiveness of local admission arrangements

4.33 Admission Forums have an important power, under section 85A(1A) of the SSFA 1998, to produce an annual report about all maintained schools and where they choose to do so, the report **must** include Academies. Admission Forums are not expected to produce complex reports that duplicate the local authority report to the Schools Adjudicator on admission arrangements in their area. They **should** have the flexibility to report as they see fit on matters that are of local interest, and provide input to the local authority report. The power for Admission Forums to report to the Schools Adjudicator replaces the power to report to the Schools Commissioner. This is part of the School

Adjudicator's widened role to enforce fair access and report annually to the Secretary of State on how it is being achieved locally.
The Schools Adjudicator will also use the local authority reports to inform this annual report.