

Session Title:	4.5 All Eyes On: London - A Case Study in Applicant Trends for 2026 Entry
Speaker(s):	Aryan Bhattacharya@idp.com
Chair:	Ross Pickering
Reporter:	Laura Williams

Speaker/Institution Bio/Information:	Aryan Bhattacharya Account Manager IDP Education UK and Ireland
Overview/Aim of session:	In a sector as evolving as Higher Education, student preferences seem to switch based on microtrends that die as quickly as they emerge. This data-driven session, led by Aryan Bhattacharya, Account Manager at IDP Education, UK and Ireland, will shine a spotlight on student recruitment trends utilising London as a case study area. Drawing on real-time applicant behaviour and regional data, Aryan will explore how London students are engaging with higher education in 2026. From borough-level trends to shifts in subject and destination preferences, this session will unpack how national changes in policy and economy are reshaping outreach effectiveness, while also highlighting early indicators from the 2027 cycle. Attendees will leave with actionable insights to inform recruitment and outreach planning for this critical market, alongside space for open discussion and shared reflections.
Workshop Content	<p>This session explored how London applicants differ from the national average in terms of timing, subject demand, and decision-making behaviour. Evidence shows that London students research earlier, progress faster through the admissions cycle, and operate within a largely self-contained recruitment market.</p> <p>London applicants begin engaging immediately after Clearing, with activity peaking in September and October. They are more cycle-driven than the UK average, clearer on their intentions, and enter both UCAS and Clearing in higher volumes. This reinforces the need for earlier, London-specific messaging and engagement.</p> <p>Subject demand in London is strongly outcomes-led. Students favour courses with clear or flexible career</p>

	<p>pathways, applied delivery, and postgraduate progression routes. Growth is concentrated in Law, Business, Engineering, and STEM-aligned subjects. In Health and Creative Arts, demand is shifting away from fixed or resource-heavy pathways towards disciplines that allow greater career flexibility, such as Psychology, Pharmacology, and performance-based creative subjects.</p> <p>Despite a high concentration of Russell Group institutions in London, applications are now broadly split between Russell Group and the wider sector, indicating a move towards more pragmatic, employability-focused decision-making.</p> <p>Overall, London emerges as a fast-moving, highly informed, and outcomes-driven market, with clear implications for recruitment timing, subject-level messaging, and positioning.</p>
Case Studies/Examples:	(see slides for full data breakdown)
Scenarios/Roundtable discussions:	N/A
Questions and Answers:	N/A
Summary Key takeaways:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • London students research earlier and move faster through the admissions cycle than the national average. • London operates as a largely self-contained recruitment market. • Subject choice is driven by employability, flexibility, and applied learning rather than prestige alone. • Demand is growing in Law, Business, Engineering, and STEM • Russell Group dominance in London is softening, suggesting more pragmatic, outcomes-focused decision-making.

