

Outcomes of the Tariff Consultation

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The consultation

In July 2021, UCAS entered a consultation period with HE providers with the aim of making some changes to the Tariff system:

- A return to focus solely on Level 3/SCQF Level 6 domestic qualifications, by tariffing all UK regulated qualifications of these levels
- The possible removal of international qualifications and non-regulated UK qualifications from the Tariff Tables, and
- The removal of the Tariff nomination process

NOTE: The methodology used to calculate Tariff points will remain the same.

In addition to these proposed changes, UCAS also recommended the removal of the Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs) portal at the end of the current calendar year.

The consultation period ended on Thursday 30th September. You can jump straight to the outcomes of the consultation [here](#).

Why UCAS is recommending changes to the Tariff and QIPs

Under the current Tariff system, external stakeholders can nominate new qualifications for inclusion in the Tariff.

The nomination process is long: For example, the deadline to make a nomination is 11 months before the subsequent Tariff update is released, meaning the minimum wait time from nomination to release is 11 months (but as most nominations are made ahead of the deadline this is usually much longer).

Relying solely on nominations means the Tariff Tables lack consistency, and it can be puzzling to students and other stakeholders when one qualification receives points but another, apparently equal, qualification does not.

Taking a download of Level 3 (and equivalent) qualifications data from UK regulating bodies and tariffing all the qualifications included would mean a much greater number of Level 3 (and equivalent) qualifications receive Tariff points, making the Tariff Tables a more comprehensive and reliable admissions tool. It would also remove the need for a nomination process, as most Level 3 UK qualifications would be tariffed.

Data which supports the proposed changes

In the past three cycles, less than 1% of UK students have applied through UCAS with one of the 46 unregulated Tariffed qualifications: 0.8% - 0.9% of learners held an unregulated tariffed qualification as well as holding at least one regulated qualification. Less 0.03% applied with just an unregulated tariffed qualification (only 130, 210 and 190 learners in 2018, 2019 and 2020 respectively). This indicates the amount of resource and time taken to Tariff unregulated qualifications is disproportionate to its use and value.

Analysis of application data indicates that in 2018, 2019, and 2020, approximately 12% of international applicants applied through UCAS with a tariffed international qualification, suggesting that most international applicants and universities are already using alternative qualification equivalency services (such as UK ENIC) to better understand these qualifications, if needed.

Engagement with universities at the UCAS Qualifications Advisory Group on 21 October 2021 revealed that universities do not exclusively accept tariffed qualifications for their entry criteria. Therefore, the removal of these qualifications from the Tariff Tables does not automatically mean they will not be considered by UK universities for progression to HE, though it should be noted each university will choose their own entry criteria and accepted qualifications will vary from institution to institution.

Regarding the QIPs portal, the total number of views for all the profiles across a twelve-month period was 5,360. This included views from UCAS colleagues maintaining the profiles. Engagement with a group of HE providers in the summer of 2020 confirmed that they all had alternative sources of qualifications data they would go to in the first instance, with comparable levels of detail being available on UK regulator websites or in qualification specifications. UK QIPs accounted for approximately 65% of all views.

UK ENIC has confirmed to UCAS their international qualifications database contains comparable level of data of the International and Global QIPs, which made up 28% and 5% of the annual views respectively. Therefore, most of the data in the QIPs portal can be found elsewhere and our engagement shows that many HE providers already consult these alternative sources.

Feedback from external stakeholders

UCAS received responses to the consultation questions from sixteen providers of higher education. The respondents included those from both large and small institutions from a range of mission groups and at least one Scottish and Welsh HE provider. In addition to this we also received feedback from 4 awarding organisations.

Proposal 1: Tariff all Level 3 (and equivalent) regulated UK qualifications

82% of the HE respondents either supported or strongly supported tariffing all Level 3 (and equivalent) UK regulated qualifications. 6% of respondents neither supported or opposed the idea, whilst 12% either opposed or strongly opposed the change.

Of the responses from awarding organisations, 3 respondents supported or strongly supported the proposed change and 1 respondent opposed or strongly opposed it.

Comments in support of the proposed change included:

- It would provide an improved set of standardised data
- It would be easier to manage applications with a mixture of qualifications
- With more qualifications being tariffed there would be fewer instances where providers would need to gather information on qualifications they were less familiar with, saving time
- The increased number of tariffed qualifications would provide more options to learners

Comments in opposition to the change included:

- Qualifications not recognised by UK regulators could stand to lose candidates, if learners/parents believe HE providers only consider tariffed qualifications
- Additional work for admissions teams when processing applications with a qualification that is set to be removed from the Tariff

HE providers were also asked if an annual Tariff update is still the right frequency, or whether universities would benefit from more frequent updates. 74% of respondents stated that continuing with an annual update is preferable, 13% would prefer more frequent updates and 13% were not sure.

Comments received included:

- Suggesting a second Tariff update in September
- Suggesting the annual update be released slightly earlier in February or March so entry criteria could be reviewed before the UCAS Search tool goes live

Proposal 2: Remove international and unregulated qualifications from the Tariff Tables

56% of HE providers supported or strongly supported this change, 19% neither supported or opposed it and 25% opposed or strongly opposed it.

With the awarding organisations, 1 respondent supported or strongly supported the change, 2 neither supported or opposed it and 1 opposed or strongly opposed it.

Comments in support of the proposed change included:

- It would be fairer to only Tariff qualifications that are governed by the same regulations, otherwise data values can become less meaningful/useful
- It would allow a more streamlined approach for International and non-standard applicants
- International qualifications are generally not assessed based on Tariff. Non-regulated qualifications are generally not used for progression to university, except for Foundation programmes where they would likely be assessed on merit regardless of Tariff.
- Retaining international qualifications may put pressure on universities to accept learners who hold them if it is perceived that UCAS 'recognises' them

Comments in opposition to the change included:

- Not to remove the Irish Learning Certificate from the Tariff (several HE providers made this comment)

The HE provider survey also asked respondents to feedback on whether to maintain existing international and non-regulated qualifications in the Tariff.

- 44% of respondents favoured the scenario of keeping the existing international and unregulated qualifications in an appendix at the end of the Tariff Tables
- 37% of respondents favoured the removal of all international and unregulated qualifications currently in the Tariff tables.
- 19% of respondents favoured keeping the existing international qualifications in an appendix at the end of the tables, only removing the unregulated UK qualifications.

Proposal 3: Remove the nomination process

63% of the HE providers supported or strongly supported the proposal to remove the nomination process (37% neither supported nor opposed it).

One awarding organisation supported or strongly supported the change, 1 neither supported or opposed it, and 2 opposed or strongly opposed it.

Comments in support of the change included:

- If UCAS takes qualifications data from the regulators' registers annually there is no point for this process
- Knowing that all regulated level 3 qualifications will make it onto the Tariff is preferable than having to nominate qualifications and wait up to a year

- The nomination process is too subjective, forces providers to accept unregulated programmes - potential quality risk

Comments in opposition to the change included:

- It's helpful if UCAS can allow nominations otherwise we would have to make our own assessment of any new qualifications [which appear between the annual updates]

Additional Comments

Finally, there was the opportunity to leave additional comments:

- There was concern expressed on the awarding organisation survey that awarding bodies who are not included on UK registers will be put at a disadvantage by the proposed changes. If it is perceived that UCAS does not 'recognise' unregulated qualifications (by way of not tariffing them) this could negatively impact the number of universities which will consider them, and the number of learners taking them
- There was criticism of UCAS holding a Tariff consultation when Tariff nominations (for entry to HE in 2023-24) are still pending

Feedback received regarding the removal of the Qualification Information Profiles

Respondents were asked to feedback on the proposal for the removal of the Qualification Information Profiles. Feedback focused primarily on the usefulness of QIPs as staff training materials and as a reliable source of information about a full range of qualifications.

Recommendations following the consultation

Considering the responses received via the survey, together with the data looking specifically at learners applying through UCAS with international or unregulated qualifications, UCAS is recommending the following changes to the Tariff system with effect from the next update (May 2022):

Proposal 1: Tariff all Level 3 (and equivalent) regulated UK qualifications

This change has been approved.

Proposal 2: Remove international and unregulated qualifications from the Tariff Tables

This change has been approved, although an exception is to be made for the Irish leaving Certificate which will remain in the Tariff Tables.

Proposal 3: Remove the nomination process

This change has been approved.

Other considerations: unregulated qualifications

UCAS recognises how the planned changes to the Tariff system may be viewed negatively by awarding bodies whose qualifications are not currently regulated.

UCAS will aim to address the concerns of unregulated awarding organisations in the following way:

- Provide clear information on the purpose of the Tariff, which awarding organisations can share will prospective learners, stating that UK universities can accept unregulated qualifications for their entry criteria if they wish to do so.
- Provide adequate information/signposting to assist awarding bodies seeking to get their qualifications recognised by a UK regulator. If they succeed in getting regulated status, under the new Tariff system, their qualifications would be automatically tariffed in the next update.

The removal of the Qualification Information Profiles (<https://qips.ucas.com/>)

This change has not been approved.

During the consultation it has become apparent that some of the QIPs contain information not found, for example, in qualification specifications, which is to do with the use of the qualification within a HE context. For example, the Extended Project QIP provides information on why a predicted grade should not be entered.

Therefore, we would like to reform the QIPs rather than remove them. Over the coming months UCAS colleagues will be working alongside members of the Qualifications Advisory Group to reshape the QIPs. In the meantime the current portal will remain active.