

New Tariff feedback exercise - outcomes

UCAS

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Foreword

This report sets out the feedback we have received from the new Tariff feedback exercise and our response.

This will be of interest to:

- higher education providers (HEPs), particularly those working in admissions, planning, and registry functions
- secondary schools and colleges across the UK, as those teaching Level 3/SCQF Level 6 qualifications and advising students applying to higher education (HE)
- other stakeholders, such as qualification awarding organisations, students, their parents and carers, representative bodies, funding councils, qualification regulators, and Government departments and HE agencies such as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the feedback exercise and gave valuable comments in the meetings, regional forums and conferences that took place across the UK this year. The feedback has been very helpful in validating our proposals and will support the roll out of the implementation plan to manage the transition to the new Tariff.

We set out our response to the feedback received in section 3. Overall, there was general support for the new Tariff and no substantive technical issues were raised. As a result, the UCAS Board has agreed that the new Tariff should be implemented for the 2017 admissions cycle, i.e. for students making applications from September 2016 for full-time courses starting from September 2017.

We would welcome your continued engagement and feedback throughout the implementation period to help ensure it is successful for all parties concerned, particularly students.

Executive summary

Following the Qualifications Information Review (QIR) in 2012, the UCAS Board agreed that the Tariff should be replaced by a simpler, more transparent and efficient approach to help higher education providers (HEPs) quantify qualifications held on entry to HE. It was recognised that any new Tariff would also have to be suitable for use by those HEPs who want to use the Tariff as a tool to support admissions, although in line with good practice, it is recommended that admissions decisions should not be made on Tariff points alone.

A number of options for a new Tariff were developed and tested using design principles to ensure that it would be fit for purpose. One new Tariff option was identified as the most viable based on the testing results and design principles. A technical briefing document explaining this new Tariff option and a qualifications list showing new Tariff points was sent to all HEPs and UK secondary schools and colleges to share our proposals and solicit feedback. Other stakeholders were also invited to provide feedback. Responses were received from 60 HEPs, 130 schools and colleges, and 25 other stakeholders. The exercise ran from 4 April to 16 May 2014.

The feedback exercise showed that there was general support for the new Tariff and no substantive technical issues have been raised. There was strong support from the majority of HEPs, and schools and colleges who responded, to implement the new Tariff for the 2017 admissions cycle. As a result, the UCAS Board has agreed to implement the new Tariff for the 2017 admissions cycle i.e. for students making applications from September 2016 for courses starting from September 2017.

A range of issues directly relevant to the new Tariff were identified in the responses. The key points are summarised below.

- A number of HEPs, particularly those who use the Tariff for admissions purposes, were concerned about the cost and challenges of implementation. We will support the transition through the provision of information and advice, and training materials. In addition, we will work with Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) to identify and promote good practice in managing the transition to the new Tariff. It should be noted that the new Tariff is being repositioned as a metric to support HEPs' management information needs while at the same time acknowledging that some HEPs will continue to use the new Tariff for admissions purposes.
- The potential impact on HEPs' league table positions was a concern for some HEPs. Modelling demonstrates that the impact on the qualifications dataset generated by HESA, which is a minor component of some national league tables, is relatively small-scale.
- A small number of schools and colleges felt that the new Tariff was more complex than the current model and almost all requested support from us to manage communication about the new Tariff to parents, students, and other stakeholders, including the provision of communication tools and a new Tariff calculator.

A number of important issues were also fed back by schools and colleges concerning the AS and A level qualification reforms. We believe they are not a direct result of any changes in the

Tariff or the methodology we propose. However, we have included this feedback in the report as it will be of interest to higher education providers, government departments, qualification regulators and awarding organisations.

- Concerns were raised about the Government's policy decision to decouple the AS in England and change the approach to the assessment of practical science in A levels.
- There was a lot of feedback regarding the repositioning of the AS to 40% of an A level. However, Ofqual has stated that the AS is not of equal demand to the A level for some time. The Welsh Government has also recently confirmed its policy position on the new AS qualifications to be introduced from September 2015. The new Welsh AS qualifications will be based on 40% of an A level.
- There was strong demand from schools and colleges for clear information from HEPs to be made available as soon as possible on how they will respond to the qualification reforms. There was particular interest in how HEPs will treat the new AS in their entry requirements.

Two issues were raised about the current Tariff, which the change to the new methodology does not address in the short-term. These are:

- a small number of respondents raised the issue that the current Tariff points allocated to BTECs and International Baccalaureate qualifications are too generous in comparison with A levels and the new Tariff does not address this. This is because the proposed methodology is based on regulated features of qualifications, such as level, size and grade described in accredited qualification specifications. It is not appropriate to introduce subjective judgements to the points' allocation. In addition, we have sought to minimise the disruption in terms of established qualification relationships. If these qualifications change in size or grading structure in the future then these changes can be accommodated in the new Tariff model
- one regulator has highlighted its view that HEPs should not use the Tariff in their offer-making and entry requirement decision-making processes. The point was made that that these decisions should be based on specific qualifications and grades. However, it is clear that a number of HEPs find the Tariff helpful in supporting their admissions and we believe that the new Tariff offers these providers a solution which is more transparent and comprehensive than the current version

Section 3 sets out our response to the feedback points and explains how we will address the issues raised concerning the new Tariff, through the implementation and communication plans that will be rolled out from September 2014. We understand the magnitude of change involved for some HEPs in moving to a new Tariff. However, retaining the existing Tariff is not an option given it cannot readily accommodate the extent of qualification reforms taking place across the UK. We believe that the new methodology and approach offers genuine benefits in terms of transparency, coverage, and flexibility – and can accommodate the reforms taking place now and those which might happen in the future.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the feedback exercise

The purpose of the feedback exercise was to solicit further views on the new Tariff to ensure it is fit for purpose as a means for measuring qualifications held on entry to HE and as a tool to support admissions to HE.

The new Tariff was developed as a result of the Qualifications Information Review (QIR). The QIR included an extensive consultation exercise involving 150 HEPs, 100 schools and colleges, 135 learners and 185 other stakeholders. More detailed information on the QIR outcomes can be found here: - <http://www.ucas.com/about-us/our-work-sector/ucas-consultations#content-toggler>

The QIR highlighted a number of issues with the current Tariff. Key concerns were:

- lack of transparency in terms of how Tariff points are allocated and a concern that points are heavily influenced by qualification size
- the inclusion of qualifications in the Tariff is determined by awarding organisations who pay to have their qualifications considered for Tariff points
- the current process is expensive and complex to administer
- the Tariff cannot easily accommodate non-traditional and vocational qualifications and frameworks such as Access to HE, SWAP and Apprenticeships

Since the QIR, significant reform of qualifications has started to take place across the UK. The current Tariff cannot easily accommodate the policy changes occurring to benchmark qualifications such as the AS and A level.

At the same time, many HEPs are planning to expand their recruitment of other EU and international students. There is increasing demand from the HE sector for international qualifications to be included in the Tariff.

We have explored a range of options for developing a new Tariff in partnership with the higher and secondary education sectors. The preferred model has been subjected to extensive testing and evaluation, as explained in the technical briefing document:

<http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-tariff-tech-briefing.pdf>

1.2 Purpose of the new Tariff

The primary purpose of the new Tariff is to provide a broad metric of qualifications at Level 3/SCQF Level 6 to support the management information needs of HEPs and statutory returns to HESA. While most HEPs set their entry requirements and make offers based on qualification subjects and grades, some prefer to use the Tariff as a convenient means to describe their entry requirements and make offers; although in line with good practice, it is recommended that admissions decisions should not be made based on Tariff points alone. Recognising the

QIR recommendation about the use of qualifications and grades for admissions purposes, we have produced guidance and case studies to support HEPs that use the Tariff to move to qualification-based admissions processes.

1.3 Feedback exercise process and analysis methodology

The new Tariff approach is explained in the technical briefing document. The technical briefing document and a qualifications list were sent to all HEPs and secondary schools and colleges across the UK, together with a questionnaire asking for feedback. The qualifications list shows the current and new Tariff points for all qualifications currently included in the Tariff.

The document *Introducing a new Tariff – Proposal, Technical briefing document* explains that the new Tariff is based on a size multiplied by grade calculation:

- qualifications will be allocated to one of four size bands based on their guided learning hours or notional learning hours (GLH/NLH)
- qualifications will also be allocated to one of 12 grade bands. These bands cover Level 3/SCQF Level 6

The feedback exercise was launched on 4 April and closed on 16 May. In addition to sending questionnaires to all HEPs and UK secondary schools, other stakeholders such as awarding organisations, funding agencies and regulators were also invited to provide comments.

The questionnaire focused on:

- how well the new Tariff addresses its design principles. The design principles were established to ensure the new Tariff is fit for purpose and addresses the issues raised in the QIR about the current Tariff
- the impact of repositioning the AS to 40% of an A level
- the proposed implementation date
- support required to manage the transition to a new Tariff

There were responses from 60 HEPs and 130 schools and colleges¹. 27 responses were received from other stakeholders. An additional 16 letters and emails were received from schools and colleges, in conjunction with one school and college representative body.

The quantitative analysis from the questionnaires is provided in Appendix 1, including illustrative examples of qualitative feedback given by respondents who provided comments to open text questions. A summary of feedback provided by stakeholders is also provided in Appendix 1. A copy of the schools and colleges questionnaire is available on our website: www.ucas.com/new-ucas-tariff-questionnaire-schools-and-colleges

¹Over 100 HEP and more than 200 school and college responses were received prior to cleansing to remove blank and multiple entries.

2. Overview of feedback received and key messages

Overall, feedback has been supportive, no substantive technical issues have been identified and there is support for implementation for the 2017 admissions cycle. Some concerns were raised by schools and colleges about the repositioning of the AS and points allocated to the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma. There was also a strong plea from schools and colleges for HEPs to make clear, as early as possible, how they will respond to the new Tariff and the qualification reforms taking place in England. The main issues raised by HEPs were about managing the change process and the associated cost.

Appendix 1 provides all quantitative feedback results in a series of tables and provides examples of qualitative feedback from respondents.

Feedback from HEPs

We received responses from 60 HEPs (16% response rate). These covered all four nations, with half of the responses coming from providers who use the Tariff as an integral part of their admissions activities. The responses from Tariff-using and non-Tariff-using HEPs were broadly similar. Any differences are highlighted below.

Design principles

Table 3 in Appendix 1 shows HEPs' overall support for the new Tariff in terms of the design principles. It shows that 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (8%) that the new Tariff will be transparent. In addition, it shows that 58% agreed or strongly agreed (5%) the new Tariff would support fair admissions, and 43% agreed or strongly agreed (5%) it would help to support widening participation and enhanced access.

The majority of other HEP respondents gave neutral responses to these questions (neither agree nor disagree). When non-Tariff-using HEPs were excluded (table 4) the proportions agreeing/strongly agreeing with these questions increased (fair admissions: 66%, widening participation: 55%) and the proportion of neutral responses decreased.

Responses about whether the new Tariff would be easy to implement were more mixed, with 32% agreeing, and 35% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (17%); the proportion disagreeing or strongly disagreeing rose to 55% for Tariff-using HEPs. For the question relating to whether the new Tariff would be expensive to implement, there was a relatively even split between those tending to agree and those tending to disagree (30% and 29%). This balance shifted to 45% tending to agree and 13% tending to disagree for Tariff-using HEPs. These issues fed through to the open text responses, summarised further below.

Usefulness of the new Tariff

Feedback on the usefulness of the new Tariff was generally positive, as shown in table 5 in Appendix 1. For example, 67% agreed that the new Tariff would inform entry requirements and 72% agreed it would enable the collection and analysis of management information. In terms of supporting Clearing, only 39% agreed that the new Tariff would be useful, possibly

because it is not widely used for this purpose and/or because of the change to different, unrounded Tariff numbers.

Table 7 in Appendix 1 also shows overall agreement that the new Tariff would be useful as a broad metric of qualification size and grade, with 75% agreeing or strongly agreeing (9%) that the new Tariff would be useful in showing qualification size and grading in combination.

Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs)

The majority of HEPs commented that the QIPs are very helpful (51%) or fairly helpful (42%) and there were requests for more to be produced.

Implementation timescale

The vast majority of HEPs (82%) supported implementation for the 2017 admissions cycle.

Support from UCAS

In terms of support from UCAS, table 13 in Appendix 1 shows there is strong support for a Tariff calculator (85%), which was suggested by HEPs in forums earlier in the year to enable the easy addition of the new numbers during Confirmation and Clearing. Ideas for support such as the provision of training, information to key stakeholders and regular communication updates and reminders, were also supported by over 75% of respondents.

Open text responses

The open text responses covered a broad range of issues; whilst many HEPs commented on the advantages of the new Tariff as illustrated in section 1.11 of Appendix 1, the key issues that arose are summarised below.

- The main issue identified concerned the challenge of implementing the new Tariff, with a range of views given. Those that use the Tariff in their admissions processes highlighted the need to change a number of systems and processes, to train staff on the new Tariff and to update published materials. Other HEPs believed they could manage the changes as part of their annual business as usual updates. One HEP commented that there were both positive and negative impacts of the change: *“one disadvantage will be in overhauling our internal and external information on the Tariff. However, with a decent lead-in time this could be a good opportunity to update our information sources.”*
- The cost of implementation was also raised as an issue. Some commented that extra resources would be needed to train staff on the new Tariff.
- A small number of respondents were concerned that changes to points may affect their league table position. This issue was primarily raised in connection with the new Tariff points allocated to Scottish Highers and Scottish Advanced Highers.

Feedback from secondary schools and colleges

We received 130 responses (1% response rate) with a reasonable geographic spread, including 31 responses (24%) from the independent sector. 82% of respondents indicated that the Tariff is important to help them understand entry requirements for HE courses, with 75% using it to inform learners about qualification choices and progression routes.

Feedback received on the key sections of the questionnaire is summarised below.

Design principles

Responses to the design principle questions are shown in table 18 of Appendix 1. Schools and colleges responded positively to the question on transparency, with 69% agreeing or strongly agreeing (23%) the new Tariff will be transparent. In terms of widening participation views were more mixed. Responses to this question showed that 36% agreed and 11% strongly agreed the new Tariff would support this design principle. However, 31% neither agreed nor disagreed and only 11% disagreed that the new Tariff would support widening participation. This may be a result of the repositioning of the AS, which was a strong theme in the open text responses, as summarised below. Table 18 in Appendix 1 shows there were also mixed responses to the question on whether the new Tariff would be easy to refer to. The open text responses summarised below show that there appears to have been some confusion amongst respondents, with some believing that they would need to calculate the new Tariff points themselves.

Usefulness of the new Tariff

Feedback on the usefulness of the new Tariff was positive overall. Table 19 in Appendix 1 shows that 15% strongly agreed and 55% agreed the new Tariff would be useful in terms of showing qualification size and grading in combination. However, 18% neither agreed nor disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed that the new Tariff would be useful in this respect. Open text comments to this question included concerns regarding the impact of repositioning the AS on student take-up. There were also some concerns from a group of schools regarding the points allocated to the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma qualifications.

Open text responses

The open text responses covered questions on the repositioning of the AS and the advantages and disadvantages of the new Tariff. Many schools and colleges commented on the increased transparency of the new Tariff. The key issues that arose in open text comments are summarised below.

- Schools and colleges were asked about the impact of the repositioning of the AS on their curriculum offer. This prompted a large number of responses. Opinion diverged with some commenting that the AS may become less attractive, whilst others commented that there would be little or no impact on the curriculum offer. Other respondents commented that there may be an increase in take up of the Extended Project Qualification. Many felt that the wider policy changes to the AS in England were more significant than changes to the Tariff.

- Responses to the question about the impact of the repositioning of the AS on students also elicited a significant number of responses, with many suggesting that there would be little or no impact. Some felt that HEPs' responses to the repositioning of the AS would be important and the change could discourage students from taking the AS. It was also noted by two respondents that GCSEs may become more important in assessing students' suitability for HE and weaker students who did less well in their GCSEs could be affected.
- A number of schools and colleges wrote to us, reiterating points made by one school and college representative body, about the proposed new Tariff points for the IB Diploma. Their concerns included the fact that the new Tariff does not give total Tariff points to composite qualifications. They would also like higher grade and size band points for the IB Standard Level.
- One school/college made the point that the new Tariff does not address the issue that the current Tariff is considered by some to be over generous in its allocation of points to the IB Diploma qualifications and BTECs, in comparison to A levels.
- Some schools and colleges, 12% of total respondents, expressed concerns about the complexity of the new Tariff compared to the current model. Some appeared to have misunderstood that the detailed qualifications list was provided to show the calculations for HEPs in an Excel spreadsheet format, so they could model the new Tariff points with their own management information data.

Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs)

These were considered to be helpful information tools that would support HEPs in understanding and comparing different qualifications. Some commented that they would enable HEPs to treat applicants with different qualifications fairly. However, some issues were raised about not being able to find them on the UCAS website.

Implementation timescale

The majority, 87% of schools and colleges, supported 2017 implementation. However, some appeared to be confused about what this meant in practice. Some schools and colleges thought it applied to HE courses starting in September 2018, instead of 2017.

Support from UCAS

In terms of support that could be provided by us, there was clear endorsement for the proposals such as training and a new Tariff points calculator. Feedback responses are shown in table 21. Additional support requests included visits from UCAS advisers, a helpline, and new Tariff promotional material for students, parents and carers.

Support from HEPs

In response to the question on support required from HEPs, there was strong demand from schools and colleges for HEPs to make their entry requirements clear. This was both in terms of the repositioning of the AS under the new Tariff, particularly in light of the policy change to decouple the AS in England.

Issues raised by other stakeholders

Responses from other stakeholders showed broad support for the new Tariff proposals. Student representative bodies responded positively and noted the benefits of the new Tariff being more appropriate for vocational and composite qualifications. Sector bodies and mission groups were generally positive in their feedback. Most of their feedback was provided informally rather than by written response.

One awarding organisation raised concerns about the grading scale and highlighted that it would prefer an approach to allocating Tariff points based on a process of qualitative review, rather than the new Tariff size band multiplied by grade band approach. Another awarding organisation requested that the process for allocating new Tariff points occur throughout the year, to ensure schools and colleges are informed as soon as possible if a new qualification is allocated new Tariff points.

Feedback from one qualification regulator reaffirmed its view that the main purpose of the new Tariff should be to provide a qualification metric that HEPs can use for management information purposes. The comment was made that it would be preferable and more transparent for HEPs to specify qualification grades and subjects in their entry requirements and offer-making. The regulator also asked us to ensure that decisions on the allocation of points under the new model are as transparent as possible. The fact that the new Tariff will include an annual feedback process, so HEPs can share their views on qualifications that have Tariff points, was welcomed. The regulator also emphasised the importance of us working with all UK qualification regulators if there are instances when the new Tariff annual feedback process suggests there are issues related to qualification size and grading.

A number of subject bodies for mathematics and one for science provided comments. The mathematics sector bodies suggested that additional Tariff points should be allocated to the AS in Further Mathematics because of the view held by some that it is more difficult. They have requested that it be positioned at 50% of an A level, whilst other subject AS qualifications are positioned at 40%. The science organisation requested that the new Tariff helps to address changes to the science A levels in England. From September 2015 A levels in England will report a candidate's practical assessment separately, it will not be part of the overall A level grade. They requested that the UCAS Tariff points for science A levels in England show whether the practical assessment has been passed.

Ministers from across the UK responded, indicating their general support for the new Tariff proposals.

3. UCAS' response to the feedback

The feedback provided by HEPs, schools and colleges about the support needed to enable a successful transition to the new Tariff is very useful. It has informed the development of the new Tariff implementation and communications plans.

Specific points of feedback highlighted in this report were discussed with the project Advisory Group and UCAS Board. Our response to issues raised are outlined below.

Decoupling of the AS qualification in England and repositioning of the AS to 40% of A level Tariff points

We recognise that some schools and colleges are concerned about the repositioning of the AS from 50% of an A level to 40%, particularly at a time when the AS qualification is being decoupled from the A level in England. However, it would not be appropriate to continue to allocate Tariff points worth 50% of an A level to the AS when Ofqual clearly states it is not of equal demand. Since the new Tariff feedback exercise was launched, the Welsh Government has confirmed that the new AS available for first teaching from September 2015 will be based on 40% of an A level. The decision to decouple the AS in England is a Government policy decision. Decisions around the demand of qualifications are managed by qualification regulators. The new Tariff needs to reflect these decisions and be sufficiently flexible and sustainable to manage any future qualification reforms.

AS Further Mathematics

All AS qualifications will be repositioned at 40% of an A level under the new Tariff, including Further Mathematics. Qualification regulators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland own the AS and A level brand and are jointly responsible for the standard of these qualifications. All AS and A level qualifications are of the same standard and the new Tariff reflects this.

Separate reporting of science A levels practical competence assessment in England

From first teaching in 2015, A levels in England will report a candidate's practical science assessment separately. Qualification regulators in England decide the approach to assessment, grading and awarding. The UCAS Tariff will treat science A levels in England the same as those developed in Wales and Northern Ireland, which will continue to include the practical competence assessment as part of the A level grading structure. We are undertaking a feasibility exercise, to explore the possibility of showing the separate grade for the practical competence assessment for English A levels within our application systems. There is a need to understand from HEPs whether they would find this information helpful for English A level applicants and how they will accommodate the cross border differences.

International Baccalaureate issues

The new Tariff points for the IB Diploma were reconsidered by the project Advisory Group in light of the issues raised by a group of schools and colleges and one representative body. It was agreed there should be no change to size bands or grade bands to increase the points allocated. A response has been sent to the representative body explaining this decision. The only change to the Tariff points, which has been agreed by the group, was to breakdown the IB Core points into its constituent parts, i.e. the Extended Essay and Theory of Knowledge. These components have recently become accredited qualifications in their own right. This change

means learners will get Tariff points based on the grades they achieve in each of these qualifications. The new Tariff points will be shown in the new Tariff tables and qualifications list due to be published in September 2014.

Points allocated to specific UK benchmark qualifications

A small number of respondents commented that the points allocated to UK benchmark qualifications such as the IB Higher Level and BTECs are over-generous under the current Tariff and remain overgenerous under the new Tariff. The new Tariff is based on calculating points based on the four size bands and 12 grade band scale for Level 3/SCQF Level 6 accredited qualifications, using information verified by qualification regulators in qualification specifications. In moving established UK benchmark qualifications to the new Tariff, we have sought to maintain established relationships between benchmark qualifications within the framework. New qualifications added to the Tariff will have points allocated based on the size and grading structure of accredited qualifications. If qualifications currently on the Tariff change in size or grading structure in the future, for example due to qualification or funding reforms, these changes could be addressed by a review of the Tariff points allocated. The new Tariff process has been designed to accommodate these sorts of changes and it will include an annual feedback process which will enable HEPs to share their views on points allocated, which will be published and shared with regulators, awarding organisations and other stakeholders to take appropriate action.

Complexity of the new Tariff points

Some schools and colleges commented that the new Tariff points appear to be more complex than the current version. We will publish a simple table of new Tariff points in September 2014 and will offer a range of support tools including a new Tariff calculator, leaflets for applicants, parents and carers, and a presentation toolkit that can be used within institutions. The new Tariff communications plan will be rolled out from September 2014. Training materials and events will also be organised throughout the year by the UCAS Professional Development Team.

New Tariff approach – transparency of decision-making

Decisions on how new Tariff points are allocated will be made clear in the new Tariff point tables, which will be updated and published as a PDF document by early September 2014. The qualifications list will also be published each time new qualifications are allocated Tariff points. This list will show exactly how decisions and calculations have been made on size and grade bands, for those interested in this level of detail. All decisions will be based on the principles for allocating Tariff points which are outlined in the technical briefing document.

New Tariff approach – process and frequency of allocating new Tariff points

We have discussed a draft process with stakeholders, including a number of HE and secondary education providers through the Tariff Advisory Group (TAG) and NQIS Project Advisory Group, as well as with UK qualification regulators and awarding organisation representative bodies. The majority supported the proposal that new Tariff points would be allocated and published on an annual basis. Assuming a 2017 implementation date it is envisaged that the new process would start in September 2015. This would involve the first tranche of additional qualifications being allocated Tariff points and published by the end of April 2016. The new Tariff process will

be discussed at UCAS HEP regional forums and the UCAS Annual Review in November 2014 before being finalised.²

Support from HEPs for schools and colleges

Schools and colleges made very clear their need for HEPs to articulate their reactions to the new Tariff and to the AS changes in England as soon as possible. We will work with HEPs to encourage clear information to be provided about entry requirements for the 2017 admissions cycle.

Cost of implementation for HEPs

The cost of managing the change to prospectuses, processes and systems has been discussed with the project Advisory Group. The cost appeared to vary depending on HEPs' views as to whether they could manage the changes in annual or other business as usual updates. We will support the transition as much as possible, by providing clear information and toolkits and, working with other partners, such as third party software suppliers, to ensure the change is managed as smoothly as possible. We will also work with SPA to identify and promote good practice in managing the transition to the new Tariff.

Use of Tariff points by HEPs in offer-making and entry requirement decision-making processes

The new Tariff is being repositioned amongst stakeholders to signal that its primary purpose is to support HEPs' management information needs. It is simply a broad metric of a qualification's size and grading structure. It should not be used in isolation to make decisions about a qualification's suitability for progression into HE. We have produced guidance to support HEPs who want to move away from Tariff-based admissions processes to qualification grades. The new Qualification Information Profiles provide important contextual information about the purpose and structure of different qualifications to support their admissions decisions. However, HEPs have the autonomy to decide if they wish to continue using the Tariff in their offer-making and entry requirements, rather than move to qualification grade-based decisions. The latter approach is preferred by one qualification regulator.

HEP league table rankings

National league tables are based on a variety of indicators, of which the data on qualifications held on entry to HE is just one relatively minor component. Tables 5 and 6 in the technical briefing document show the potential impact on the relative rankings of HEPs based solely on average qualifications held on entry, which is relatively small-scale. In addition, there are many other changes occurring to the qualification system which are likely to have an effect on league table rankings by the time the new Tariff is implemented. We will continue to work with HESA to ensure the transition to the new Tariff runs smoothly. HESA is supporting the new Tariff communications plan as it is represented on the NQIS Project Advisory Group. Communications will include notifications to HEP planning teams to ensure they are aware of key dates that affect them during the change process. HESA is also willing to support the change by providing data on the old and new Tariff point systems, covering the period 2016-2018.

² In terms of the current Tariff process, there will be two further business as usual TAG meetings operating under the current Tariff. One will take place in September 2014 and the final one will be held in April 2015.

Qualification Information Profiles

Further QIPs will be developed based on the positive feedback received. Suggestions to make them more accessible on the UCAS website will also be implemented.

4. Next steps for implementation

A full implementation plan and communications plan will be rolled out from September 2014. These plans will take into account all the suggestions for support made by the HEPs, schools and colleges that responded to the feedback exercise.

A high level implementation plan is provided in Appendix 2. Based on the new Tariff 2017 implementation date, the key deadlines are:

- new Tariff points published in September 2014³
- students likely to enter HE in 2017 start studying Level 3/SCQF Level 6 qualifications in September 2015
- entry requirements for 2017 agreed by October 2015
- university prospectuses published around February 2016
- UCAS search tool and Apply have entry requirements with new Tariff in June 2016
- students make HE applications, which may involve the new Tariff, from September 2016
- some HEPs make new Tariff offers from October 2016
- students take final exams in summer 2017 and start HE in autumn 2017

³The new Tariff points will be published in September 2014 to avoid any confusion amongst 2014 HE applicants during the summer holidays.

Appendix 1 – Summary of feedback

The sections below provide the feedback responses to each question for both the HEPs' questionnaire and the schools' and colleges' questionnaire. A selection of quotes is also provided to illustrate the feedback received. Other stakeholders' feedback is summarised in section 3.

1. Feedback from HEPs

1.1. Breakdown of respondents

Overall we received responses from 60 different HEPs, although a number of providers made multiple submissions. This is a response rate of 16%. Of the 60 HEPs, 29 were classed as Tariff-using, i.e. over 50% of their 2014 courses have Tariff-based entry requirements. The geographical spread was:

Table 1: Geographical spread of HEPs (60 respondents)

	No.	% of HEP respondents
England	52	87
Northern Ireland	2	3
Scotland	3	5
Wales	3	5

HEPs indicated that their current use of the Tariff was as follows:

Table 2: HEP respondents' use of the Tariff (60 respondents)

	No.	% of HEP respondents
Establish, inform or review entry requirements	47	78
Describe entry requirements	30	50
Evaluate applications	41	68
Make points-based offers	26	43
Make combined points-grades-based offers	22	37
Manage Clearing	30	50
Management information/KPI	51	85
Report to HESA	52	87
Evaluate unfamiliar qualifications	45	75

1.2. Alignment with Tariff design principles – to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Table 3: Design principles – all HEPs (60 respondents)

Question	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree/disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %
Will be transparent	8	78	7	3	3	2
Will be able to include additional qualifications	13	60	17	3	3	3
Will help to support fair admissions	5	52	33	7	3	0
Will help to support widening participation and enhance access	5	38	50	2	3	2
Will help to support my organisation in managing qualification reforms	7	53	32	3	3	2
Will be easy for my organisation to implement	0	32	32	18	17	1
Will be expensive for my organisation to implement	7	23	30	22	7	12

Table 4: Design principles – Tariff-using HEPs (29 respondents)

Question	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree/ disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %
Will be transparent	3	72	14	7	3	0
Will be able to include additional qualifications	10	69	14	3	3	3
Will help to support fair admissions	7	59	24	7	3	0
Will help to support widening participation and enhance access	0	55	41	0	3	0
Will help to support my organisation in managing qualification reforms	7	59	28	3	3	0
Will be easy for my organisation to implement	0	24	21	24	31	0
Will be expensive for my organisation to implement	14	31	34	10	3	7

1.3. Usefulness of the new Tariff – do you agree or disagree that the new Tariff will:

Table 5: Usefulness of the new Tariff – all HEPs (59 respondents)

Question	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree/disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %
Inform entry requirements	5	67	16	9	3	0
Assessing applications	9	66	17	5	3	0
Making offers	5	50	19	19	5	2
Support Clearing	2	39	35	16	5	4
Enable collection and analysis of MI	5	72	19	0	3	0

Table 6: Tariff-using HEPs (28 respondents)

Question	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree/disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %
Inform entry requirements	4	64	18	11	4	0
Assessing applications	7	75	11	4	4	0
Making offers	7	64	14	7	7	0
Support Clearing	4	41	37	15	4	0
Enable collection and analysis of MI	4	61	32	0	4	0

1.4. Points allocation - to what extent to you agree or disagree with usefulness of the new Tariff in terms of qualifications size, grade and overall?

Table 7: All HEPs (58 respondents)

Question	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree/disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Qualification size	5	67	21	5	2
Qualification grading	3	64	24	7	2
Qualification size and grading in combination	9	66	21	5	0

Table 8: Tariff-using HEPs (29 respondents)

Question	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree/ disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Qualification size	4	68	14	11	4
Qualification grading	4	61	21	11	4
Qualification size and grading in combination	11	64	18	7	0

1.5. AS repositioning - what impact will the repositioning of the AS to 40% of the A level have on your HEP?

Key points made in relation to this question were (50 respondents):

- there will be no impact for many HEPs as the AS is not used in offer-making
- fewer applicants are likely to take them
- HEPs may no longer accept two AS in lieu of an A level

Typical responses:

“AS results are not generally taken into account in any event.”

“Small, in general do not consider AS levels when calculating offers.”

“Little impact as long as all those concerned in the recruitment and admissions process are aware of this.”

“Will have to reconsider the use of two AS levels in place of a third A level. It is likely that AS levels won't be considered for entry.”

“It will affect our minimum entry criteria. This will need to be reviewed and a decision will need to be taken as to whether or not we continue to accept AS levels as part of the Tariff offer.”

“We previously accepted two AS levels in place of an A level, this would no longer be the case.”

1.6. Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs) - how helpful do you find the QIPs?

Table 9: All HEPs (57 respondents)

Question	Very helpful %	Fairly helpful %	Not very helpful %
How helpful do you find QIPs?	51	42	7

Table 10: Tariff-using HEPs (28 respondents)

Question	Very helpful %	Fairly helpful %	Not very helpful %
How helpful do you find QIPs?	39	46	14

Key points made in relation to the QIPs (21 respondents):

- QIPs provide essential information about the suitability of qualifications
- particularly useful for European and international qualifications where detailed information is hard to find
- would welcome more QIPs for international, vocational and other UK qualifications

“These will help with widening participation and to provide more detailed information for academic staff during decision-making for less well known qualifications.”

“This will be a useful resource for admissions staff particularly as it offers a range of information regarding a qualification, e.g. size, grading structure, assessment and content. This will be particularly useful for European and international qualifications where current guidance can be limited and contradictory.”

“It is essential to look at the QIPs before looking at the Tariff to ascertain whether the qualification is academically suitable.”

“We are very impressed with the QIPs and we look forward to seeing them expand to cover additional markets. We hope that the QIPs will in time be linked fully to the new Tariff to ease the workload in developing our ‘internal Tariff’ and which in turn will aid consistency and fairness. Furthermore, one of our international scholarships is linked to grade and we are currently finding it challenging to ensure the scholarships are awarded fairly and transparently regardless of the qualification awarded. We believe the QIPs and expanded new Tariff will help us.”

“Not used at present. We process very large numbers of applications and expect to provide general guidance to admissions tutors that is easy to assimilate, fair and reflective in the way qualifications are judged. However, we do not anticipate that tutors will need to have read and assimilated the data in the QIPs. We think the QIP is generally useful, and essential background reading, but too detailed for routine use.”

1.7. Implementation timeline – do you agree with the proposed timescale – admissions cycle 2017?

Table 11: All HEPs (47 respondents)

	%
Yes	82
No	18

Table 12: Tariff-using HEPs (30 respondents)

	%
Yes	75
No	25

Key points raised in response to this question:

- admissions cycle 2017 appears to be a logical time to introduce the new Tariff, taking into account the qualification reforms taking place at the same time
- some concern raised that admissions cycle 2017 is too soon, that an introduction by admissions cycle 2018 would allow more time to plan updates to IAG and train staff

Typical responses:

“The 2017 entry cycle will bring major qualification reforms and therefore it seems sensible and appropriate to introduce the new Tariff to coincide with this.”

“Although we would have preferred more time as the timeline is short we do agree that this needs to be done in line with the other changes in relation to qualifications.”

“I think a further 12 months would be required before they are published so that our IAG can be updated/amended and staff trained across the university (including Outreach staff) so that they have some knowledge and answers when advising students.”

“This seems a very suitable length of time to allow HEIs time to prepare for this change. We hope that as much work will go into training and guidance for school/college-based advisers as appears to be planned for HEIs.”

“From an applicant perspective in light of the go live date they have sufficient time to make informed decisions about their future and qualification choices. Lots of pressure on us as an institution as we will need to be fully prepared ... and have information on our own website relating to the changes.”

1.8. Implementation challenges – what do you think the key challenges of implementing a new Tariff will be for your university or college?

The key challenges fed back were as follows (53 respondents):

- training staff
- updating systems/entry criteria
- disseminating information

Typical responses to this question:

“Ensuring that all staff understand and engage with the changes. There will have to be a programme of staff development to support implementation of the new Tariff, redefining entry requirements, IAG, etc.”

“Ensuring that ALL staff have the knowledge and understand of the new Tariff. Significant change to computer systems - algorithms for calculating Tariff.”

“Challenges will be numerous as the change will impact on a variety of teams across the institution from marketing and admissions to planning and faculty staff.”

“As a Tariff institution we will need to rewrite our entry requirements and these will need to be reflected on our website/prospectus/decision libraries on our student records system.”

“Ought to be relatively straightforward to implement. At the current time, we foresee the principle challenge being to educate prospects and applicants, providing a consistent message throughout the institution, and to update MI reports and queries.”

1.9. Cost – what do you think the main implementation cost will be for your university or college?

The main cost areas indicated by respondents are outlined below (53 respondents):

- updating systems
- staff training
- updating materials
- communicating to stakeholders

Typical responses to this question:

“Updating publications but this should be able to be contained within the usual planned update period due to the long lead time.”

“The main additional costs will be staff time dedicated to the project and any system changes required to cater for the new Tariff. This will be university-wide resource and is difficult to predict until the project has been scoped in full.”

“Training and communication will be the key costs to ensure that both staff and potential applicants are aware of the changes to the system. We will need to work with our key stakeholders (schools/colleges) to ensure the message is clearly and effectively communicated.”

“The main cost will be the time spent on system changes.”

“We are an institution with its own in-house IT systems and, as such, we may be among those universities faced with the biggest challenges in terms of both budget expense and staff hours needed to effect changes. This is why an immediate and continued dialogue is required once the new Tariff is published.”

1.10. Support from UCAS – what support do you think UCAS should provide to universities and colleges?

Table 13: All HEPs (60 respondents)

	%
Regular communication updates and reminders	87
Information to key stakeholders such as schools and colleges	85
Training	77
A new Tariff point calculator	85

Table 14: Tariff-using HEPs (29 respondents)

	%
Regular communication updates and reminders	90
Information to key stakeholders such as schools and colleges	83
Training	86
A new Tariff point calculator	90

1.11. Advantages and disadvantages – what do you think the advantages and or disadvantages of the new Tariff are for your university or college?

The key themes from responses to this question are summarised below (52 respondents).

Advantages of the new Tariff:

- a wider range of qualifications can be allocated Tariff points
- international qualifications can be accommodated
- it is perceived to be clearer and more transparent than the current Tariff

Disadvantages of the new Tariff:

- the effort involved in managing implementation of the new Tariff
- potential impact on HE league tables – a concern that the repositioning of some qualifications will lead to changes in ranking

Typical responses:

“In the long run, a much clearer system but lots of training required and potential confusion along the way.”

“The new Tariff will allow more qualifications to be included and will be much fairer as there will not be a cost for the awarding bodies.”

“Alongside the QIPs, provides greater transparency and potential for incorporation of a wider range and number of qualifications such as Access to HE, European qualifications etc. Disadvantages: short-term challenges in data analysis involving the Tariff scores, and need for staff training regarding FAQs from applicants.”

“Advantages will be a clearer, more manageable system. Disadvantages will be in overhauling our internal and external information on Tariffs. However, with a decent amount of lead in time this could be a good opportunity to update our information sources.”

“There may be a direct impact to league table position, specifically related to Scottish qualifications and AS. If previously non-countable qualifications are also added it is yet to be seen whether it will have an undesirable effect on the relative position of our institution.”

“Disadvantages: the need to rewrite entry requirements and the knock on effects from that. Resource needed to train admissions staff and tutors. Advantages: help with assessment of qualifications as a starting point particularly if international qualifications are included.”

1.12. Advantages and disadvantages - what do you think are advantages and/or disadvantages of the new Tariff for applicants?

The key advantages and disadvantages respondents fed back are summarised below (52 respondents).

Advantages:

- a broader range of qualifications can be allocated Tariff points
- the process is fair and will be clear to applicants

Disadvantages:

- students need to be aware that the new Tariff is a simple broad metric of qualification size and grade, also that not all HEPs use the Tariff, as many prefer to set entry requirements and make offers based on qualification grades. This highlights the need for applicants to have clear information, advice and guidance (IAG)
- the new points system will take time to bed in and there may be some confusion amongst applicants during the transition phase, particularly in light of all the qualification reforms taking place at the same time

Typical responses:

“Fairer weightings. Clarity over how Tariff points are assigned. They should make more educated decisions about the qualifications they take, rather than just those on the Tariff. Shows value of certain qualifications against others.”

“More qualifications will be included but I am concerned that the Tariff doesn't consider how well a qualification prepares an applicant for HE. So applicants may choose a qualification based on high Tariff points, for example, a BTEC qualification and then discover that some universities won't accept that qualification, regardless of the Tariff points, because such students don't perform well on their degree programmes.”

“Applicants will need to be aware of the new Tariff which will take time and will require an easy way of calculating the scores as they seem not as straightforward as the previous Tariff which applicants are used to.”

“It will be clearer for applicants. Probably fairer for Scottish applicants who wish to study outside of Scotland.”

“Applicants in 2017 may be confused by the changes being introduced for qualifications in the UK education system, and although we anticipate that the Tariff will provide some stability through this change, it may add another point of confusion for applicants.”

“We consider the new Tariff to be more reflective of the value placed against those qualifications that are included. We believe the proposed model is more representative of the current education environment. However, we would ask that UCAS continually reiterates that the Tariff is an optional tool at offer-making for higher education providers.”

2. Schools/colleges

2.1. Breakdown of respondents

Overall we received responses from 130 different schools and colleges. The geographical spread is outlined in table 15 below and type of schools and colleges are detailed in table 16.

Table 15: Geographical spread of schools and college respondents (130 respondents)

	No.	% of school and college respondents
England	108	83
Northern Ireland	4	3
Scotland	12	9
Wales	6	5

Table 16: School and college type (130 respondents)

	No.	% of school and college respondents
Sixth Form college	14	11
FE college (inc F/HE)	18	14
Academy	22	17
Independent school	28	22
State school	44	34
Other	4	3

2.2. At your school or college how much is the current Tariff used?

Table 17: Use of the current Tariff (127 respondents)

Question	Not at all %	Minor consideration %	Fairly important %	Important consideration %	Most important factor %
To help plan the post-16 curriculum and qualifications you offer	29	25	18	26	2
To help understand entry requirements for higher education courses	2	16	11	45	26
To help inform advice to learners about qualification options that support progression to HE	10	15	8	50	17
To help explain the value of qualifications to parents and guardians	9	18	17	43	13
As a guide to evaluate unfamiliar qualifications	10	29	22	30	9

2.3. Design principles - to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Tariff?

Table 18: Design principles (130 respondents)

Question	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree/disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %
Will be transparent	23	46	18	7	5	2
Will help to support widening participation and enhance access	11	36	31	11	3	8
Will be easy for my school or college to refer to	14	37	25	15	7	2

Key themes raised under comments (41 respondents):

- the new Tariff looks more complicated and concern was raised that teachers will have to calculate points themselves
- others commented that the new Tariff is simple and more transparent than the current Tariff
- some concern was raised around managing change to the new Tariff
- issues about the repositioning of the AS. For example, concern was raised that it might affect students who make poor initial choices to a greater extent than those that are clear about the A levels they will take
- Russell Group reactions are considered to be important, even though selective universities do not use the Tariff in their entry requirements and offer-making processes

Typical responses:

"This involves calculation which makes it time-consuming and confusing for some."

"I think the idea of bands and within that grade bands is simple and straightforward."

"I fear the new system looks more complex than that already in place. As per previous response, we would only make reference to it should the universities to which our students apply start to make Tariff rather than grade offers."

"Like with any major change, it will take time to embed into our natural way of thinking towards qualifications and progression."

"Russell Group do not use now, their reaction/use will be important."

2.4. Allocation of points – to what extent to you agree or disagree that the points provide a useful guide...?

Table 19: Allocation of points (119 respondents)

Question	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree/disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Qualification size	15	61	16	6	2
Qualification grading	14	63	15	5	3
Qualification size and grading in combination	15	55	18	9	2

Key themes raised under comments (17 respondents):

- concern was raised regarding the repositioning of the AS qualification
- a number of concerns were raised by schools reiterating the points made by one school and college representative body in relation to the points allocated to the IB Diploma in terms of its size, grade points for the Higher Level and Standard Level, and the fact that the overall Diploma does not attract overall Tariff points

Typical responses:

“This will further erode the value of AS level.”

“There is a discrepancy between the qualification size of AS levels and IB Standard Levels. IB Standard Level (SL) subjects have the same ‘depth’ as IB Higher Level subjects, just a reduced ‘volume’.”

“Need a simple calculator app to make this easy to understand.”

“More at issue is the nature of the new exams and how they will be graded!”

2.5. AS repositioning – what impact do you think the repositioning of the AS to 40% of the A level will have on your curriculum offer?

Key themes raised under comments (89 respondents):

- AS repositioning – views that take-up may decrease and fewer students will do four AS qualifications
- some respondents commented that it would have little or no impact
- Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) offer may increase or schools may move to more vocational qualifications
- the policy changes occurring to AS and A levels in England are more significant than the new Tariff changes

Typical responses:

“Whether or not we offer AS levels alongside A levels will depend upon what we as a school think our curriculum should be and what universities will ask for. As such, we would probably still offer AS, alongside the EPQ.”

“AS levels will be offered, but students are not likely to take them up in large numbers.”

“I imagine we will push the EPQ in addition to an alternative AS as an option for some students.”

“Currently looking at the role of the AS within the Government proposal that it is no longer part of an A level. The Tariff is not part of the consideration.”

“Likely to diminish, particularly given the uncoupling of AS/A2 that seems likely. We may well lead all students to take only three subjects from the beginning of Year 12.”

2.6. AS repositioning - what impact will the repositioning of the AS have on students applying for higher education?

Key themes raised under comments (88 respondents):

- little or no impact
- students may take A level instead across a three year programme
- AS repositioning – cannot substitute two AS for an A level, this will affect lower attaining students
- GCSE results will be more important in assessing students (potential disadvantage to those with fewer good GCSEs)

Typical responses:

“Limited as we expect the majority to still receive grade offers.”

“Depends whether HE admissions policies remain the same.”

“Most universities require three A levels so I don't think it will have a massive effect. Very few of our students will go to uni with two A levels and one AS.”

“It will be problematic for students who do not achieve so many full A levels, and perhaps have two AS instead, but the restructuring of the qualifications themselves may well be of more significance there than the Tariff value.”

“It will mean that GCSE grades will be the only external grades offered to support references. Internal exams or mocks are never reliable.”

2.7. QIPs – general comments

Key themes raised under comments (20 respondents):

- considered a useful resource for HEPs to help them understand the diverse range of qualifications that applicants may hold
- some issues raised about their accessibility as they are only available on the providers' section of the UCAS website

Typical responses:

"I welcome these, as it means HEPs will be able to clearly compare and evaluate different candidates with different qualifications equally."

"The QIPs are great. I can use them without using the Tariff and will do so. Looking forward to more countries being added although I know how much work must go into making one for a country."

"Entering QIP in the search box on the UCAS website produced no results."

"We wholeheartedly support UCAS QIPs which provide the sort of information we have looked for in our own research, and fill a potential 'gap' in information provided by UK NARIC. We recognise, however, the continuing challenges in bringing this information together in a coherent fashion to inform our institution-specific policies. We hope that QIP format continues to respond to sector needs and suggestions and expands to consider wider international qualifications, as well as supporting the non-traditional, emerging and/or vocational qualifications of learners with potential to progress to HE."

2.8. Implementation – do you agree with the implementation timeline – admissions cycle 2017?

Table 20: Implementation timeline admissions cycle 2017 (109 responses)

	%
Yes	87
No	13

Key themes emerging from the comments made in response to this question (50 respondents commented):

- some support for a delay until 2018 or 2019 so that all AS and A level reform has been implemented to enable major qualification reforms to bed down
- some support for implementation as soon as possible

Typical responses:

"Gives us time to get to grips with this as staff and then look at ways to best communicate this to our students and parent body."

“This accommodates learners who are starting further education in 2014 - they can plan ahead for 2017”.

“As with all present change in the education world, this is too quick.”

“Not in line with AL reform - some ALs still AS/A2 until 2019 result.”

2.9. Support from UCAS – what support do you think UCAS should provide to schools and colleges?

Table 21: Support required from UCAS (130 respondents)

Question	%
Regular communication updates and reminders	72
Information to key stakeholders such as parents, guardians & learners	70
Training	50
A new Tariff point calculator	80

Other suggestions made by respondents (9 respondents commented):

- promotional materials
- UCAS adviser visits and a new Tariff helpline

2.10. Support from HEPs – what information do you need from HEPs?

Key points raised under comments (93 respondents):

- significant demand for early notice of HE entry requirements for the 2017 admissions cycle because of the qualification changes taking place. Ideally schools would like to understand how HEPs will respond now, i.e. in 2014
- there must be clear deadlines about timing of change
- a request that HEPs make clear whether or not they will use Tariff or qualification grade-based or mixed offers
- clarity about which qualifications HEPs will consider acceptable or unacceptable. For example, whether it will be acceptable to hold two AS qualifications instead of an A level
- examples of typical current and new Tariff offers to allow for comparison
- simple, clear information for applicants and parents/carers
- prospectuses and websites all need to be updated consistently

2.11. Timing of information/support – when would you need this information assuming a 2017 implementation date?

Key themes raised (95 respondents):

- most respondents indicated clear information would be appreciated as soon as possible for the reasons outlined in section 2.10 and to ensure applicants are aware of entry requirements prior to starting Level 3/SCQF Level 6 qualifications
- there is some misunderstanding about what 2017 entry is – some comments imply that this is seen as application in 2017 for 2018 entry

Typical responses to this question are listed below:

“Autumn 2016 as this is when we start introducing students to their research for completing their UCAS form through visits to universities etc, so the information they get during these visits needs to reflect the process that will be implemented for the 2017 cycle.”

“As soon as possible to influence current curriculum planning.”

“By Sept 2014 so that we can correctly advise and guide the first cohort of students who will enter under the new Tariff structure in 2017 about the courses they should take commencing 2015.”

“January 2015 to be built into IAG for prospective candidates.”

2.12. Advantages and disadvantages - what do you think the advantages and/or disadvantages of the new Tariff are for schools and colleges?

The key advantages and disadvantages respondents fed back are summarised below (84 respondents).

Advantages:

- the new Tariff is clearer than the current Tariff
- the new Tariff should be more inclusive/comprehensive – as long as HEP offers reflect more qualifications coming onto the Tariff
- the new approach is fairer than the current Tariff

Disadvantages:

- the points appear to be complex
- some recognition that familiarity with the old system will require adaptation
- concerns regarding the repositioning of the AS

Typical responses to this question are listed below:

“Better parity and clarity but not very significant to my centre given we largely offer A levels and target selecting HEPs.”

“For schools, the impact of the Tariff will be relatively similar to the previous one, except we will have to amend the advice and information we give to parents and students.”

“The addition of GLH will give some subjects clarity. There will be a period of confusion but with training I am sure any issues will be overcome.”

“Disadvantage as further change when there is already too much change in education. The desire to 'fix' everything is ruining education. There are no advantages within that context.”

“The Tariff itself is not the problem it is the status of the new AS and how it is to be taught.”

“There is now a fairer footing for vocational qualifications – I think those schools and colleges offering alternatives to A levels will be in a happier position.”

“For us the disadvantages are that the IB Diploma is not being recognised as a full programme of study – no credit is being given for achieving the Diploma per se – for the completion of the Core – even if students haven't been awarded bonus points.”

2.13. Advantages and disadvantages - what do you think the advantages and/or disadvantages of the new Tariff are for applicants?

The key advantages and disadvantages respondents fed back are summarised below (80 respondents).

Advantages:

- the new Tariff is clearer and more transparent than the current Tariff
- it will support a wider range of qualifications and recognise applicant diversity, if HEP offers in line with this

Disadvantages:

- views that AS students will be disadvantaged and that the system will be confusing whilst the old and new versions of A level and AS are in use in England
- the numbers appear to be complex and may be more difficult for applicants to understand

Typical responses to this question are listed below:

“I don't think they are disadvantaged or advantaged by the changes, but it depends on how universities will see different qualifications and how they will compare between them. For example, two students could have the same Tariff points through A levels for one student and a BTEC for another, but would universities see these two students equally?”

“If schools explain the changes clearly, there should be no disadvantages for applicants.”

“Will it still encourage students to apply to institutions for which they are under-qualified? How will universities let applicants know about requirements other than those expressed in the Tariff?”

“There will be a lot of confusion initially but the new Tariff is fairer overall.”

“Allocating a full A level size to an IB higher seems a bit generous – the old Tariff was always perceived as overgenerous to IB, and university 'equivalent' offers never followed it. This seems to perpetuate that issue. On the other hand, grading a D at BTEC as an A* at A level seems over generous to BTEC, particularly in some subjects, as there are many students who can achieve a D* at BTEC but would not get near an A* at A level. I work in two schools, one where we have a mix of A level and BTEC students, and one where we have a mix of A level and IB students.”*

3. Other stakeholders

Approximately 63 stakeholders that cover key interests and groups across the sector, plus awarding organisations, were invited to feedback on the fitness for purpose and proposed implementation timeline. 27 stakeholders have responded, including awarding organisations, HE agencies and school and college and subject associations, and one qualification regulator.

Key points raised by other stakeholders are detailed below.

Fitness for purpose

- There was clear support for the proposals from most organisations.
- One awarding organisation requested that the grading scale be extended beyond A* at A level.
- One school and college association raised issues regarding the IB Diploma because it does not attract total Tariff points and the IB Standard Level has been allocated to size band 2 rather than size band 4. It would also like higher points to be allocated at particular grades for both the IB Standard Level and the IB Higher Level.
- A number of mathematics bodies commented that they would like the AS in Further Mathematics to be positioned at 50% of an A level, as they consider it to be more difficult than other subject AS qualifications.
- One science body commented that it would like separate, additional recognition for the practical assessment of science in terms of new Tariff points.
- One HE sector body made a number of points in relation to the AS repositioning and positioning of Scottish Highers and Scottish Advanced Highers, which they believe advantage Scottish applicants.
- One regulator stressed that the new Tariff should be seen as a broad measure of a qualification not a precise one. The point was made that HEPs should base their offers on qualification subjects and/or grades, not the Tariff. The regulator also commented that decisions on the allocation of new Tariff points to qualifications should be as transparent as possible. The importance of involving the UK qualification regulators as part of the new Tariff annual feedback process was emphasised. This will ensure that if there is feedback from HEPs to suggest there are issues with new Tariff points, the qualification regulators can consider the appropriate action they may need to take. For example, claims about qualification size or grading may be investigated, leading to a review.

Implementation timeline

- Support for implementation in admissions cycle 2017 amongst most stakeholders apart from one HE sector body.
- One awarding organisation, and an awarding organisation representative group, indicated they are very keen to work with us on the new process for allocating Tariff points to qualifications, to ensure new Tariff points are added in line with other key education sector timelines such as qualification accreditation cycles.

Appendix 2 - Implementation plan

High level plan and key milestones

1. Introduction

The purpose of this plan is to provide a view of the key milestones required to implement the new Tariff from the perspective of UCAS, HEP and secondary education providers. This plan will be subject to further development at each of the key stages identified. This will ensure it remains relevant to the changing environment that the new Tariff will operate in over the four-year implementation period.

2. Objectives and approach

The main objective of the plan is ultimately to implement the new Tariff for the 2017 admissions cycle; however this has been broken down into a key number of interim high level objectives:

- new Tariff is published
- all parties fully understand the impact of the switchover to the new Tariff
- all parties have plans in place to make the required changes for the switchover
- all change required is completed in advance of the switchover and all parties are trained and ready
- the switchover takes place successfully in time for the 2017 admissions cycle
- post-switchover, operation of the new Tariff is reviewed and evaluated

The plan has been built around these key objectives and is based on us being the focal coordinating point with HEPs, schools and colleges, advisers, third party software providers and other key stakeholders. To support this extensive engagement a communications campaign will be run throughout the period of the implementation.

The implementation of the new Tariff will coincide with significant qualification reforms.

The image features a background of overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of red. A white, trapezoidal banner is positioned on the right side, containing the text 'UCAS'. The 'A' in 'UCAS' is a distinct red color, while the other letters are black.

UCAS