

February 2012



Qualifications Information Review

CONSULTATION

UCAS

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Foreword

As the Chair of the Qualifications Information Review Steering Group and on behalf of the UCAS Board, I am pleased to launch this consultation on the future of qualifications information in support of admissions to higher education.

This consultation represents a comprehensive review of the qualifications information needs of higher education institutions (HEIs), schools, colleges and advisers and applicants to higher education (HE).

Information about qualifications is an important factor in admissions to HE. Universities and colleges use this information in a variety of ways: to inform both entry requirements and the decisions that institutions make in relation to interviews, offers, and the confirmation of places.

In 2001 UCAS introduced the Tariff mechanism to facilitate comparisons between different kinds of qualifications. However, during the last decade, the number, diversity and complexity of qualifications offering pathways to HE has expanded substantially. Concerns have grown that the Tariff mechanism lacks sufficient flexibility to keep pace with the changing nature of the qualifications environment and is being used for purposes for which it was not designed.

The HE sector is in a period of transition. The 2011 Higher Education White Paper, along with changing funding and number control arrangements, and the changing profile of applicants and provision, has created a more market driven sector in England, where quality information and well-informed decision making is key. An integral part of the information required, both from prospective applicants and HEIs, is in relation to qualifications.

The need for quality information is a UK-wide requirement, with the Entitlement Framework in Northern Ireland, the Welsh Qualifications Review, the Wolf Review and A level reform in England and the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland all adding to the diverse nature of the qualifications market.

Our review of the qualifications information needs of the sector to enable fair, transparent and efficient admissions and the recommendations outlined in this report are therefore timely.

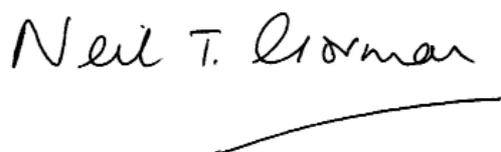
The extensive evidence base generated from the review has led us to identify a number of key messages from the sector.

- A clear appetite for improved information about qualifications that is easy to access and would enable HEIs more easily to make appropriate decisions regarding entry requirements and offers and help learners make more informed choices about HE study.
- Support for a standardised means of reviewing qualifications which would help HEIs make consistent offers across the increasing range of qualification types.
- Improved communication with learners and their advisers regarding the use of qualification information in admissions and a move towards an understanding that some qualifications are regarded as more relevant for progression to certain HE courses than others.

These messages form the basis of the recommendations that we make in this document.

We are consulting on the recommendations which together form an exciting and comprehensive new shared qualifications information service for UCAS members, schools, colleges, advisers and learners. We would welcome responses from those who share the requirement for qualifications information for HE admissions purposes, including HE admission staff, those who advise learners, HE staff and agencies involved with management information, applicants to HE and awarding organisations. All responses to this consultation will be analysed fully and will form the basis of final recommendations for a new system of qualifications information.

This review presents us with the opportunity to ensure that the qualifications information available to HEIs, learners and their advisers supports fair, transparent and efficient admissions and that UCAS provides a new system of qualifications information which reflects the changing demands of the sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neil T. Gorman". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line that serves as a separator.

Professor Neil T Gorman
Chair of the Qualifications Information Review
Steering Group
Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University

Section I: Introduction

1 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to consult on proposals for the establishment of a package of new qualifications information services to inform and facilitate fair and transparent admissions to higher education. These proposals arise from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) Qualifications Information Review (QIR).
- 1.2 These proposals have consequences for those working in HE admissions, those intending to apply to HE for undergraduate programmes and their advisers in schools and colleges across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
- 1.3 The proposals will also be of interest to stakeholders such as examinations and awarding organisations, students and their parents, organisations that represent students and HEIs, government departments and their agencies.
- 1.4 We wish to consult widely on these proposals and welcome feedback from all stakeholders.
- 1.5 This is a UK-wide consultation and is open until 16 April 2012. In addition to the opportunity to respond online during this period, UCAS will be holding a number of consultation events, the details of which will be published on the UCAS website.
- 1.6 A report of the consultation and proposed next steps will be published in July 2012. This timescale allows for articulation with the UCAS Admissions Process Review¹.
- 1.7 Section IV outlines how to respond to the consultation and how to register for consultation events.

2 Context

- 2.1 Universities and colleges are autonomous, independent organisations responsible for setting their own policies and criteria for admission to HE.
- 2.2 Information about qualifications informs the entry requirements for access to individual courses and in many cases, the decisions that institutions make in relation to interviews, offers, and the confirmation of places.
- 2.3 Institutions use information about the prior achievement of applicants, usually the qualifications that they hold or are in the process of studying for, to inform admissions decisions. Although institutions also consider an applicant's potential to benefit from their proposed course of study, the contribution that they will make to the institution, and other factors (which may include performance in interview, admissions test or audition, a portfolio of work, prior work or learning experience, or contextual information), information about qualifications is an important determinant in decision-making.
- 2.4 As the provider of the UK's shared admissions service, UCAS offers a range of qualifications information services, including the UCAS Tariff (a qualifications comparison service) and various publications. UCAS also provides information online to help students understand what qualifications are accepted for various courses and to assist HE admissions staff in understanding the nature and content of different qualifications.

¹ For more information on the UCAS Admissions Process Review (APR) please see the UCAS website <http://www.ucas.com/reviews/admissionsprocessreview/>

- 2.5 There is no requirement for universities or colleges to use UCAS Tariff points in setting entry requirements or for offer- or decision-making. In practice, entry requirements and offers for more competitive courses tend to be expressed in terms of qualifications and grades, or as a combination of Tariff points, qualifications and grades rather than on the basis of Tariff points alone.
- 2.6 Most institutions, as well as HE funders and regulators, use Tariff points as a convenient way of producing statistical information about the extent of the qualifications held on entry by students at particular institutions or taking particular courses.

3 Rationale for the review

- 3.1 During the last decade, the number, diversity and complexity of qualifications offering pathways to higher education has expanded substantially. Concerns have grown about the ability of the Tariff (which was introduced in 2001) to cope with the increasing diversity of qualifications achievements presented by applicants to HE, and also about the use of the Tariff for purposes for which it was not designed, for example sifting applications for graduate entry employment schemes.
- 3.2 In response to demand from the HE sector, the UCAS Board launched the Qualifications Information Review (previously known as the Tariff Review) in 2010. The review aimed to:
 - understand and articulate what requirements learners, institutions, and other stakeholders have for information about qualifications to enable fair, transparent and efficient admissions to higher education

- review how effective the Tariff and other approaches are in meeting these needs
- work with a wide range of stakeholders, including regulators and awarding organisations, to develop and consult on improvements and alternative approaches.

3.3 The UCAS Board asked Professor Neil Gorman, the Vice Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University, to chair the steering group for the review. Members of the steering group, to whom UCAS owes thanks for their engagement and advice during this review, include:

- Kate Davidson, previous Head of Undergraduate Admissions Service, University of Stirling
- Gerry Kelleher, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University
- Paul Teulon, Head of Admissions, King's College London
- Anna Vignoles, Professor of Economics of Education, Institute of Education
- Tim Westlake, Director for the Student Experience, The University of Manchester

4 Scope and methodology

- 4.1 The scope of the review initially focused on the UCAS Tariff but it very soon became clear that the breadth of information used by HEIs about qualifications is much wider than just the Tariff.
- 4.2 The review set out to provide a robust qualitative and quantitative evidence base to enable UCAS to fully understand the range of information about qualifications that different stakeholder groups require.

4.3 The review opened with a detailed information gathering stage which included:

- one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders and representatives of stakeholder groups
- focus groups held across the country with learners, HE admissions staff, staff from schools and colleges (including advisers), representatives from awarding organisations and government, regulatory and funding bodies
- an online survey with eight stakeholder-specific questionnaires.

4.4 These activities gained feedback from approximately 150 HEIs, 100 schools and colleges and 135 learners, as well as 185 other stakeholders (including awarding organisations, government bodies, employers, sector skills councils and parents). Details of the findings from the information gathering stage can be found on the UCAS website (www.ucas.com/qireview).

4.5 Once the information gathering stage had been completed, the review team analysed this evidence and developed a series of proposals for a new and improved system of qualifications information based on the findings and issues identified

4.6 These proposals were then further developed following feedback from HE admissions staff and members of the review reference group at technical workshops held across the UK.

Section II: Findings

5 Key findings and messages from the review

5.1 **Tariff coverage:** In July 2011, the Tariff incorporated approximately 1,400 level 3 qualifications, which equates to around 30% of the total number of level 3 qualifications regulated by the Office for Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual). Although UCAS analysis suggests that the vast majority of level 3 qualifications presented by applicants using the UCAS system are covered by the Tariff, there are gaps in coverage which can limit its usefulness as an admissions tool and in supporting efforts to widen participation. For example, the Tariff methodology does not accommodate Access to HE qualifications or complex qualification frameworks such as apprenticeships.

5.2 **Tariff usage:** UCAS Tariff points were designed to provide universities and colleges with a convenient tool to support student recruitment. Although many institutions have chosen to use Tariff points in setting their entry requirements and in offer-making, most of the more selective institutions and the majority of institutions in Scotland have elected to retain grade-based entry requirements and offer-making. The review found that over the last decade many HEIs have moved away from using UCAS Tariff points in isolation to set entry requirements or for admissions purposes. There is evidence that the introduction of the new student number control arrangements in England for entry to HE in 2012 is accelerating this change, with the majority of English HEIs that use Tariff points for admissions

purposes indicating that this usage will be in combination with qualifications and grades.

- 5.3 **Tariff methodology:** Some HEIs have expressed concerns about the Tariff methodology which compares² new qualifications against a benchmark qualification (usually A levels or BTEC awards) in order to establish a Tariff point score, rather than using an agreed set of criteria for comparison purposes. Some HEIs have also questioned the methodology used to allocate Tariff points to large composite qualifications and framework awards, when admissions staff are more interested in achievements within constituent awards for admissions purposes.
- 5.4 **HEIs' need for more information to support entry requirements and admissions:** The review found that HE admissions staff require more comprehensive and comparable information about qualifications than is currently provided by the UCAS Tariff, including more information about international qualifications.
- 5.5 **HE efficiency opportunities:** HE admissions staff face difficulties in researching new and unfamiliar qualifications as there are many different sources of information, and information is presented in different ways. Many expressed concerns regarding duplication of effort across the sector.
- 5.6 **A need for new qualifications information tools:** HE admissions staff identified a need for qualification information services that better reflect the ways in which HEIs value and use qualifications information for progression purposes. For example, HEIs typically do not equate lower achievement in large qualifications with higher achievement in smaller qualifications – although comparable Tariff points may imply a more direct equivalency.
- 5.7 **HE's view of learners' expectations:** HEIs report that an emphasis on Tariff points in setting entry requirements and in offer-making, rather than on a qualification's relevance to a particular course of study, has over time encouraged learners to think about level 3 (or equivalent) qualifications in a mechanistic way. Many learners focus on the total number of Tariff points a qualification could provide rather than on its inherent relevance in relation to particular HE courses. This can result in learners developing unrealistic expectations about the suitability of their qualifications for progression to HE.
- 5.8 This focus on the total number of points obscures the fact that HEIs regard some qualifications and subjects as more suitable for progression to specific courses of study than others. This can and does vary between institutions. Such differences in approach reflect institutional experience about the extent to which individual qualifications, different assessment methods, and different subjects prepare students to engage successfully with and complete various courses of study.
- 5.9 **Learner awareness of the extent of Tariff usage:** Some learners are not aware that the UCAS Tariff is an optional tool and that many HEIs do not use Tariff points for offer-making.
- 5.10 **Learner awareness of the value of qualifications for progression:** Some learners are unaware that individual institutions are responsible for their own admissions policies and that different institutions will consider some qualifications as more relevant for progression to their courses than others.

² This comparison process includes reference to ten 'domain' areas

5.11 Encouragement to take additional qualifications: Learners reported being encouraged to take supplementary level 3 courses or qualifications in schools and colleges on the basis that these will attract additional Tariff points. Learners are subsequently disappointed to discover that some of these qualifications (and the points they attract) are not always considered to be relevant when they apply to HE.

5.12 Learner confusion about the currency of Tariff points: From the learner's perspective, the use of Tariff points within admissions is confusing. Whilst entry requirements may be specified in terms of Tariff points, when it comes to offer-making HEIs may restrict the range of qualifications or subjects from which Tariff points can be gained (for example they may accept points from A levels but not AS levels), or they may limit the points that can be gained from certain subjects or qualifications. The use of combined Tariff point and grade-based offers is widespread but some learners can be surprised to receive offers made on this basis.

5.13 The Tariff is valued for management information purposes: Aside from its use within admissions, the UCAS Tariff provides a basis for management information measures used throughout HE. Stakeholders have indicated that it is important that any changes to current arrangements continue to meet the need for management information.

5.14 Use of the Tariff for unintended purposes: There is evidence that Tariff points are being used by some employers to screen applications from individuals applying for graduate entry schemes. Whilst some employers may find this a

helpful way of discriminating between graduates with similar degree results, it may disadvantage those students whose qualifications may not attract Tariff points³, such as older students and students who have progressed to HE from vocational qualifications.

5.15 The review identified three key messages from stakeholders that have shaped proposals:

- a clear appetite for improved information about qualifications that is easy to access and would enable HEIs to make appropriate decisions regarding entry requirements and offers more easily and help learners make more informed choices about HE study
- support for a standardised means of reviewing and comparing qualifications, which would help HEIs make more consistent offers across the increasing range of qualification types
- improved communication with learners and their advisers regarding the use of qualification information in admissions and a move away from a 'points means places' approach to HE progression, towards an understanding that some qualifications are regarded as more relevant for progression to certain HE courses rather than others.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Proposals were endorsed by the QIR steering group in July 2011 and have been refined through further testing with HE focus groups. These proposals were approved for consultation by the UCAS Board in December 2011.

³ We note initiatives to improve the quality of information available to graduate recruiters such as the HE Achievement Record (which provides information on students' leadership and employability skills). These aim to provide a better indication of graduate suitability for employment than degree results alone.

6.2 The review recommends:

6.2.1 Recommendation 1:

The development of UCAS *Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs) and an associated database* designed to give admissions tutors the information they need about the qualifications presented by applicants. These will focus on UK-regulated level 3 (and equivalent) qualifications and selected international qualifications (including the International Baccalaureate).

6.2.2 Recommendation 2:

That HEIs consider the gradual withdrawal of the use of UCAS Tariff points for setting entry requirements and in offer-making, coupled with the promotion of the greater use of qualifications and grades for setting entry requirements and making admissions offers and decisions. This will provide learners with a clearer indication about the relevance of their chosen qualifications to particular courses of study at different institutions. This would need to be accompanied by an extensive and ongoing communication programme to support applicants and advisers.

6.2.3 Recommendation 3:

The development of a rigorous *means of comparing 'demand' across different qualifications*, underpinned by independent criteria and validated by HE, to support HE admissions decision-making.

6.2.4 Recommendation 4:

The provision of a simple *qualifications metric for management information* purposes (rather than for the purposes of offer making).

6.2.5 Recommendation 5:

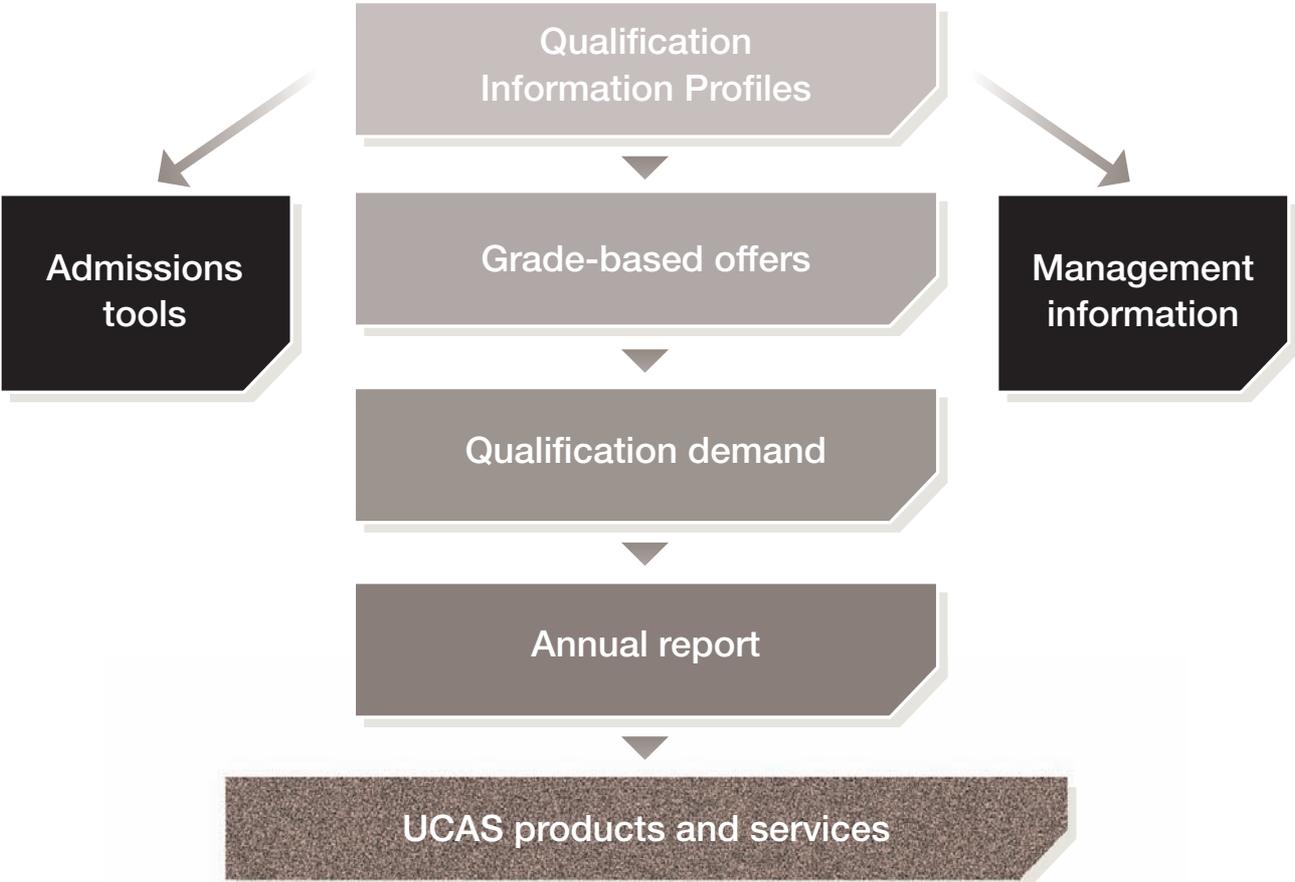
The publication of a *UCAS annual report* on the use of qualifications within HE admissions.

6.2.6 Recommendation 6:

If there is demand from HEIs, the development of *optional admissions tools*. For example for those HEIs that wish to make more flexible grade-based offers, it may be possible to express standard entry requirements and offers automatically in terms of a wider range of qualifications, or to compare automatically the attainments of a learner with a mixed qualifications profile against standard entry requirements.

- 6.3 UCAS also intends to use the outcomes of the review to strengthen existing UCAS products and services and support improved quality and consistency of advice and information about the use of qualifications within HE admissions to learners and their advisers.
- 6.4 Together these recommendations, illustrated in Figure A, represent a new shared UCAS qualification information service for HE, students and their advisers and other stakeholders.
- 6.5 These recommendations aim to support **fairness, transparency and efficiency** in HE admissions. Section III outlines each recommendation in detail. Consultation questions are included in the text and focus on the extent to which the proposals outlined here deliver on these key aims. All proposals are consistent with the implementation timescales of the Admissions Process Review. For more on the consultation process and how to respond, see Section IV.

Figure A: A new shared UCAS service



Section III: Recommendations

7 Recommendation 1: Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs)

7.1 The review has proposed that UCAS generates Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs) for UK-regulated level 3 qualifications, relevant Scottish level 6 and 7 qualifications, advanced level apprenticeships, Access to HE courses and key international qualifications (as identified by HEIs) in order to meet HE admission information needs⁴.

7.2 These profiles would be accessed through an online, searchable database and would include information, already in the public domain, drawn from a range of existing sources (such as Ofqual and the Scottish Qualifications Authority) as well as UCAS.

7.3 Example information fields include:

- awarding organisation
- qualification type
- qualification size
- grading
- structure
- content
- assessment methods.

7.4 QIPs would also include additional information that has been identified as important in helping HEIs evaluate the relevance of certain qualifications to particular HE courses but is not currently available for all qualifications (such as information on grade distributions⁵ and certification information).

7.5 Information on qualification demand has also been identified as an important field within these profiles. This issue is covered in full under Recommendation 3.

7.6 Information about a wide range of qualifications would be available in one place and expressed using a standard format⁶. This would represent a considerable time saving to HE admissions staff.

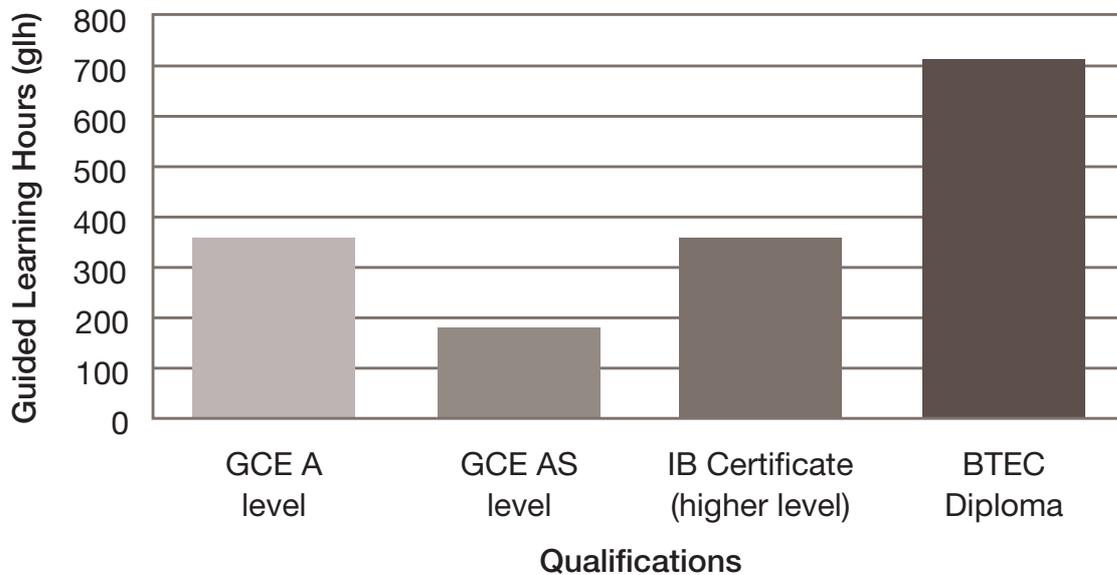
7.7 As the database would be fully searchable, it would allow HEIs to compare unfamiliar qualifications against more familiar benchmarks. For example, an HEI in Scotland might wish to compare unfamiliar qualifications against Scottish Highers. Figure B shows how QIPs could be used to compare the size of various qualifications.

⁴ Some HEIs have also requested that UCAS supply information about level 2 qualifications. This is not a proposal at this stage. However, a consultation question is included on this matter to assess the demand for similar information about level 2 qualifications.

⁵ Feedback from HE suggests that information on grade distributions is most valuable for admissions purposes when presented at a subject level rather than in terms of qualification type or individual awarding body.

⁶ Although profiles will be available for UK regulated level 3 (and equivalent) qualifications, some information fields may not be available for all awards (for example, grade distributions in relation to non-graded awards) or where information within certain fields does not follow a consistent format (for example, on the content of awards).

Figure B: Example of possible comparisons of the GLH of different level 3 qualifications



7.8 Learners and their advisers would be able to access more detailed information about qualifications. They would access this information through improvements within existing UCAS services such as Apply and Course Finder. This greater transparency will help develop a shared understanding of how qualifications are used within admissions.

7.9 The Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs) would aim to address many of the issues identified in the information gathering stage.

7.9.1 They would provide **comprehensive** coverage of UK-regulated level 3 (or equivalent) qualifications used within HE admissions and include information regarding apprenticeships, Access to HE courses and selected international qualifications as determined by the sector.

7.9.2 Information about a wide range of qualifications would be presented in a consistent format in one place, offering a single system which would be simple and easy to understand and use, delivering efficiency savings within the admissions process.

7.9.3 QIPs would offer HEIs the **flexibility** to tailor their views and use of qualifications information in the light of their institutional missions and admissions needs for example, enabling broad comparisons between qualifications or providing more detailed information about less frequently seen qualifications.

7.9.4 QIPs would include on-screen information on data sources and definitions of qualifications information (for those who want it), enabling users to have greater confidence in the **validity and reliability of information.**

7.9.5 The system would be **updated and extended** on an annual basis to ensure currency of information and to incorporate new forms of qualifications and information fields as these become available and are deemed necessary for inclusion by HE.

7.9.6 The system would build on a **“collect once, use many times”** approach to data collection and management and would promote information sharing between partners.

7.9.7 By providing clear information about qualifications, QIPs would support fair and transparent decision-making in admissions.

7.10 Figure C shows an extract from a draft QIP for a single award. Similar profiles are proposed for composite awards, advanced level apprenticeships and Access to HE courses. The fields shown within these profiles relate to information most of which is already collected by qualifications regulators, UCAS and its data partners. New information about qualifications will be added to profiles as this becomes available from data partners.

Figure C: An extract from a draft QIP

5. Certification end date	31 Aug 2015																														
6. Qualification size	360 glh																														
7. Grading	A*/A/B/C/D/E E = Pass Grade distribution: applies to all learners across all awarding organisations <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2008</th> <th>2009</th> <th>2010</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A*</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>9.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A</td> <td>33.7%</td> <td>34.8%</td> <td>25.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>24.5%</td> <td>23.6%</td> <td>24.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C</td> <td>18.1%</td> <td>17.8%</td> <td>18.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D</td> <td>12.6%</td> <td>12.4%</td> <td>12.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E</td> <td>7.6%</td> <td>7.9%</td> <td>7.6%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				2008	2009	2010	A*	-	-	9.3%	A	33.7%	34.8%	25.5%	B	24.5%	23.6%	24.3%	C	18.1%	17.8%	18.1%	D	12.6%	12.4%	12.3%	E	7.6%	7.9%	7.6%
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A*	-	-	9.3%																												
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D	12.6%	12.4%	12.3%																												
E	7.6%	7.9%	7.6%																												
8. Qualification Demand	<i>To be defined through consultation</i>																														
9. Structure	All units are mandatory within the qualification.																														
10. Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Kinetics, Equilibria and Organic Chemistry ● Energetics, Redox and Inorganic Chemistry ● Investigative and Practical Skills in A2 Chemistry ● Foundation Chemistry ● Chemistry in Action ● Investigative and Practical Skills in Chemistry 																														

7.11 If this proposal is approved, the first versions could be made available by September 2013 to inform the setting of entry requirements for September 2015 entry. As it happens currently this means that young people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will be selecting their level 3 qualifications in January to April 2013 (for courses starting in September 2013) and may be subject to HE entry requirements (for September 2015) which were not published at the point at which they selected their level 3 courses. Views are invited upon the timing of implementation and what transition arrangements may be necessary to ensure that young people are not unfairly disadvantaged by the timing of implementation.

Recommendation 1

The Qualifications Information Review recommends the development of UCAS Qualification Information Profiles and an associated database designed to give admissions tutors the information they need about applicants' qualifications.

Consultation Questions

- To what extent do you agree, in principle, with the recommendation to develop Qualification Information Profiles and an associated database?
- What would be the impact of this recommendation on you/your organisation?
- To what extent does this recommendation support fairness, transparency and efficiency in HE admissions?
- A number of stakeholders have identified additional information that they would value about qualifications. To what extent do you agree that the following information should be included,

alongside judgements relating to academic demand?

Personal skills (e.g. team working and self management)

Vocationally related skills and knowledge

Other

- Have you any views on how this information might be collated and presented?
- To what extent do you agree that profiles of apprenticeships and Access to HE courses should be made available to HE, alongside level 3 UK and selected international qualifications?
- To what extent would you welcome further information about other courses/qualifications/ tests, such as level 2 qualifications or admissions tests?
- Please tell us whether you would favour a September 2013 or January 2014 launch of the Qualification Information Profiles and associated database and why you give this preference.
- What transition arrangements, if any, do you think may be necessary to ensure that future applicants are not unfairly disadvantaged by implementation timing?
- What communications and guidance would be necessary to support implementation of this recommendation?

8 Recommendation 2: A move towards grade-based entry requirements and offers

- 8.1 Based on feedback from HEIs and learners, the review recommends that HEIs should consider moving away from the use of Tariff points and qualification scores for setting entry requirements and for offer-making within HE admissions. Grade-based entry requirements and offers are more transparent to learners and their advisers and help to reinforce the importance of qualification relevance to specific courses of study.
- 8.2 This move should be coupled with the introduction of a new UCAS qualifications information system, including the introduction of Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs) and a new qualifications information database (Recommendation 1). QIPs should be available for regulated UK level 3 (and equivalent) qualifications, apprenticeship frameworks, Access to HE courses and HE-identified international qualifications. These will give HEIs more information about qualifications to enable them to set appropriate and consistent course entry requirements and offers with respect to different qualifications. QIPs will include information on how qualifications compare in terms of academic 'demand' (Recommendation 3).
- 8.3 The review recognises that the proposed move towards grade-based offers would need to be accompanied by an extensive communication programme to support learners and their advisers in schools, colleges and elsewhere.

- 8.4 UCAS would also commit to maintaining the Tariff for an agreed period of time for those institutions that wished to continue to use Tariff points for setting entry requirements and offer-making. There would, however, need to be continuing limitations on the assessment of any new qualifications for inclusion in the Tariff.

Recommendation 2

The Qualifications Information Review recommends that HEIs consider the gradual withdrawal of the use of UCAS Tariff points for setting entry requirements and for offer making, coupled with the promotion of the greater use of qualifications and grades for setting entry requirements and making admissions offers and decisions. This would need to be accompanied by an extensive communication programme to support applicants and advisers. UCAS would commit to maintaining the existing UCAS Tariff for an agreed period of time, but would not evaluate new qualifications for inclusion after an agreed deadline.

Consultation Questions

- To what extent do you agree, in principle, with the recommendation for the gradual withdrawal of UCAS Tariff points for setting entry requirements and for offer making, coupled with the promotion of grade-based entry requirements and offer making?
- What would be the impact of this recommendation on you/your organisation?
- To what extent does this recommendation support fairness, transparency and efficiency in HE admissions?
- What are your views about the proposed timing of the withdrawal of the use of UCAS Tariff points so that grade based entry requirements are encouraged for all course starting in 2015 (set by HEIs in 2013)?

- If agreed, we plan to introduce Qualification Information Profiles from September 2013. During the transition phase, there will be the need for the Tariff to run at the same time as this new system. For how long should UCAS maintain the UCAS Tariff after the introduction of Qualification Information Profiles? From when should we cease to evaluate new qualifications for inclusion in the Tariff?
- What actions could UCAS take to support you/your organisation during any transition from the use of Tariff points in admissions to a qualifications-based model?
- What communications and guidance would be necessary to support implementation of this recommendation?

9 Recommendation 3: A means of comparing 'demand' across qualifications

9.1 Many HEIs, who do not currently use the Tariff for offer-making nonetheless find it useful as a point of reference in constructing offers in relation to less familiar qualifications. However, concerns regarding the Tariff (outlined previously) limit its value in this context. Many HEIs would value a more transparent way of comparing qualification grades in terms of academic 'difficulty' or 'demand' separately from qualification size, as this would help inform their offer-making.

9.2 The academic 'demand' of a qualification can be defined in a wide variety of ways, and is related to:

- the amount and type of subject knowledge required to be assimilated
- the complexity or number of processes required of the learner, the extent to which the learner has to generate responses to questions from their own knowledge, or the extent to which resources are provided
- the level of abstract thinking involved
- the extent to which the learner must devise a strategy for responding to the questions.

9.3 The review proposes that UCAS works with HEIs to agree **independent criteria** for analysing academic demand. As a starting point we would take criteria which are currently used by Ofqual to evaluate international qualifications⁷, which are based on academic research⁸ and have been used in qualification development for some time. They consider four dimensions of academic demand - complexity, resources, abstractness and strategy (CRAS). For those interested in further details of these criteria, a short briefing note is available on the review webpage (www.ucas.com/qireview).

9.4 Please note that any measure of academic demand would not seek to evaluate a qualification in terms of its contribution to the development of wider personal skills or vocationally related skills and knowledge. This information would be addressed within the Qualification Information Profiles.

⁷ *International Comparisons in Senior Secondary Assessment*, Ofqual, Feb 2011 Ofqual/11/4814

⁸ 'The demands of examination syllabuses and question papers' Alastair Pollitt, Ayesha Ahmed & Victoria Crisp in 'Techniques for monitoring the comparability of examination standards' QCA2007

- 9.5 It is proposed that UCAS establish a qualifications advisory group, made up of HE subject and qualifications experts, to agree a rating scale based on these criteria and hence identify qualifications of equivalent levels of demand for HE admissions purposes. This group would also:
- confirm qualifications of equivalent demand based on expert analyses of qualifications against agreed criteria
 - publish reports summarising the evaluations underpinning the demand rating process
 - review findings from the UCAS annual qualifications survey (see paragraph 9.9)
 - agree, on behalf of the sector, additional qualifications to be analysed for demand
 - endorse the UCAS annual qualifications report (Recommendation 5).
- 9.6 Agreement of these criteria and a rating scale would lead to the creation of a UCAS grade table enabling the highlighting of qualifications/grades that are rated as being equivalent in terms of academic demand irrespective of subject matter and qualification size⁹.
- 9.7 For new qualification types, the academic demand rating would take into consideration:
- draft QIPs
 - a sample of specifications
 - a sample of assessment materials
 - a sample of students' work.
- 9.8 For qualification types that already have Tariff points, the academic demand rating process would also take into consideration existing UCAS Tariff expert group reports and other relevant evidence¹⁰.
- 9.9 It is proposed that a mechanism would be established to allow HEIs to nominate new qualifications to be demand rated in the future, perhaps through an annual survey. This survey could be informed by an annual UCAS report to the sector regarding the recent use of qualifications within HE admissions and qualifications-related policy developments (Recommendation 5).
- 9.10 Feedback from HEI focus groups suggests that they find the table below offers a transparent way of comparing qualification grades in terms of academic 'demand' separately from qualification size and that they would find this helpful in informing entry requirements and offers.

⁹ It is likely that there would be a minimum limit on the size for qualifications to be demand rated e.g. minimum 120 guided learning hours (glh).

¹⁰ UCAS will be exploring how offer-making information could be collected and held in a way which is more useful for analysis.

Figure D:
 Extract from draft UCAS grade equivalences table to support HE admissions decision-making

Qual 1	Qual 2	Qual 3	Qual 4	Qual 5	Qual 6	Qual 7	Qual 8	Qual 9
A*		A*		A*				
A		A		A		A*	A*A*A*	
B						A	AAA	
C		B	A*	B				
D			A					
E	A*				A*			A*
	A		B	C	A	C	CCC	A
	B							B
	C		C		B			
	D			D	C			C

9.11 The alignment of grades within Figure D is provided for example purposes only. Equivalences shown here are not based on analyses of demand as these have yet to be undertaken. We have not identified actual qualifications here as it is likely that ratings and equivalencies will change following analyses of qualification demand. Once completed, those interested in the detailed judgements underpinning equivalences would be able to access the qualification reports published by the qualification advisory group via the UCAS website.

9.12 Although ultimately these grade equivalencies would be underpinned by detailed demand ratings, discussions with stakeholders have found that there is little appetite to retain the formal use of 'qualification scores' within HE admissions as this would lead to continuing misunderstanding regarding the relevance of different qualifications for progression to specific HE courses.

9.13 Grade-based offers informed by these equivalences and other information within the QIPs are seen as providing a more transparent admissions experience for applicants and offer better control over admissions to HEIs.

9.14 Whilst the UCAS grade equivalences table would include a wide range of qualifications, it remains up to individual HEIs to decide which qualification types they accept for specific courses. These would continue to be communicated to applicants via institutions' own websites and UCAS Course Finder.

9.15 HEIs that have previously made points-based offers without restrictions are likely to wish to continue to accept a wide range

of alternative qualifications. The examples below show how HEIs with different admissions requirements might use the UCAS grade equivalences table to display entry requirements.

How UCAS grade equivalences could be used to display entry requirements

1. Standard offer: CCC at A level
This university accepts Scottish Highers, BTEC Nationals, Pre-U, IB qualifications, using the equivalences outlined in the UCAS scale.
2. Standard offer: ABC grade at A level; 6, 5, 5 in IB Higher Level certificates.
Subject requirements: B grade in A level mathematics; 5 in IB HL mathematics.
This university also accepts Scottish Advanced Highers, Highers and Pre-U including mathematics, using the equivalences outlined in the UCAS scale.
3. Standard offer: Distinction Merit (DM) Edexcel National Diploma (QCF).
This college accepts a range of qualifications using the equivalences outlined in the UCAS scale that represent a comparable programme size.

- 9.16 The establishment of equivalences based on an academic demand scale would bring a new transparency to qualification comparisons.
- 9.17 From the perspective of learners and their advisers the use of UCAS grade equivalences to set entry requirements and make offers would also help make the admissions process more transparent. However, it is important that proposals also support fairness in admissions. In particular, the review has been concerned to establish whether the focus on academic demand might lead to the down-valuing of vocational qualifications with respect to HE progression.
- 9.18 Vocational qualifications can vary considerably in the extent to which they deliver academic demand and provide opportunities for external assessment. This information about qualifications will be made available to HEIs through the QIPs for the first time.
- 9.19 Vocational qualifications that are already in the Tariff will also be rated in terms of 'academic' demand. However, it is likely that the majority of vocational qualifications, which are not currently included in the Tariff, will not be rated unless they are identified as priorities for demand rating by HEIs. This means that for most vocational qualifications, judgements about offer-making will be made on the basis of a range of QIP fields rather than solely academic demand.
- 9.20 It is therefore the judgement of the review that together with proposals for QIPs, the use of academic demand ratings to inform qualifications equivalences and the promotion of grade-based offers is consistent with its aims of supporting fair and transparent HE admissions.

Recommendation 3

The Qualifications Information Review recommends the development of a rigorous means of comparing 'demand' across different qualifications, underpinned by independent criteria and validated by HE, to support HE admissions decision-making.

Consultation Questions

- To what extent do you agree, in principle, with the recommendation for the development of a means of comparing 'demand' across different qualifications, underpinned by criteria and ratings validated by HE?
- How would this recommendation affect you/your organisation?
- To what extent does this recommendation support fairness, transparency and efficiency in HE admissions?
- Please share any comments you have on the proposed academic demand criteria.
- Please share any comments you have on the role of the qualification advisory group.
- What guidance and communications support would be necessary to support the implementation of this recommendation?

10 Recommendation 4: A simple qualifications metric for HE management information purposes

- 10.1 Whilst there appears to be a dwindling appetite for use of Tariff points or total qualification scores in setting entry requirements and offer-making, the need for a qualifications metric remains strong for management information purposes, not only for universities and colleges, but also amongst HE funders and regulators, researchers and policy makers in government and elsewhere.
- 10.2 Discussions with funding bodies and statistical agencies suggest that for management information purposes, a metric is needed that combines size and demand of qualifications. It would also be desirable to ensure that all level 3 (or equivalent) qualifications are included in the metric. Some HEIs would also like any level 4 qualifications students have ‘on entry’ to their programme to be included.
- 10.3 Whilst it is important that review outcomes support management information, it is also accepted that these needs should not drive qualifications information developments. Hence, it is proposed that the detailed development of management information metrics is considered following agreement in the demand rating of qualifications to support HE admissions decision-making (Recommendation 3).
- 10.4 We are mindful too of the pressures on HEIs and the need to ensure that any new metric does not place additional administrative costs or burden on institutions, for example in terms of data collection.
- 10.5 Figure E shows how qualification demand could be combined with qualification size using uniform scales, to produce a qualification metric that is not unduly distorted by either dimension¹¹.
- 10.6 It would equally be possible to calculate a metric that reflects a student’s total qualification score or vary the way in which qualification size is calculated. These are matters for the sector to decide upon once the demand rating scores have been agreed.
- 10.7 Figure E shows the same notional grade alignments as in Figure D, but includes information about qualification size (expressed in terms of guided learning hours) and a numerical qualification demand score based on ratings against the academic demand criteria.
- 10.8 Actual qualifications have not been identified here as it is likely that ratings and equivalences will change following analyses of qualification demand. However, the greater emphasis on academic demand evident within this approach is likely to result in different equivalences than those that arise from the current Tariff.
- 10.9 For example, it is clear that ‘Qual 2’ represents a lower level of academic demand than ‘Qual 1’. Hence, a candidate with AAA at Qual 1 on entry would attract significantly more management information points than a student with AA at Qual 1 and AA at Qual 2.
- 10.10 Please note that the scores included in this image are for example purposes as qualifications are yet to be demand rated. Nevertheless, these examples are helpful in showing how metrics based on an academic demand rating might differ from the current Tariff.

¹¹ Qualification demand here is expressed as a standard scale of 1-100 and qualification size is expressed as a proportion of a standard programme of 1080glh. This is to ensure that both dimensions have a comparable effect on the resulting score and to limit the number of points that can be gained from qualifications with high glh.

Figure E: Management information metric. Note all scores are provided for **example purposes only**.

Uniform scale	Standardised demand scale	Qual 1	Qual 2	Qual 3	Qual 4	Qual 5	Qual 6	Qual 7	Qual 8	Qual 9
100	16									
93.75	15	A*		A*		A*				
87.5	14							A*	A*A*A*	
81.25	13	A		A		A				
75	12							A	AAA	
68.75	11	B								
62.5	10			B	A*	B				
56.25	9	C						B	BBB	
50	8									
43.75	7	D			A					
37.5	6		A*				A*			A*
31.25	5	E	A		B	C	A	C	CCC	A
25	4		B							B
18.75	3		C		C		B			
12.5	2		D			D	C			C
6.25	1									
glh		360	180	320	240	360	225	360	1080	180
Size [#]		33%	16%	30%	22%	33%	21%	33%	100%	10%

[#]Size is expressed as a proportion of a programme equivalent to 1080 glh.

10.11 The proposed approach would:

- ensure management information is based on more robust measures than the current Tariff
- entail minimal additional development costs as it builds on the HE-validated demand criteria and rating scale
- enable all qualifications¹² to be considered within management information measures.

10.12 The risk remains that any qualifications metric designed for HE management information purposes will be adopted by other users for different purposes and lead to mixed messages about the value of qualifications within HE admissions. However, institutions and sector bodies can mitigate this risk by promoting the use of grade-based offers as a means of providing greater transparency in offer-making (Recommendation 2).

10.13 Any new qualification metric would run in parallel with the UCAS Tariff for a period of time to allow for the maintenance of time series data and an orderly changeover of systems and reporting.

Recommendation 4

The Qualifications Information Review recommends the development of a simple qualifications metric for HE management information in conjunction with HESA and HEFCE, SFC, HEFCW and DELNI and following agreement on the UCAS demand criteria and rating scale.

Consultation Questions

- To what extent do you agree, in principle, with the recommendation to develop a simple qualifications metric for HE management information purposes?
- How would this recommendation affect you/your organisation?
- To what extent does this recommendation support fairness, transparency and efficiency in HE admissions?
- Do you think that any dimensions other than academic demand and qualification size should be considered within HE management information metrics?
- What guidance and communications support would be necessary to support implementation of this recommendation?

¹² Where a new qualification has not been demand rated by the qualifications advisory group (as it has not been prioritised by the sector) a provisional rating could be generated by UCAS (e.g. linked to the pass grade of a comparable qualification). The annual qualifications report would highlight where such provisional measures have been necessary and indicate where these may have exerted a significant influence on HE performance measures.

11 Recommendation 5: An annual report on the use of qualifications in HE admissions

11.1 HEIs look to UCAS to provide robust data and analysis on the relationships between qualifications, offers, and acceptances. The development of UCAS' new IT platform and enterprise data strategy, as well as enhancements to the admissions process and strengthened analytical capability, would provide the basis from which to fully exploit data for the benefit of UCAS members and students.

11.2 The review believes that there is an appetite for the provision of an annual qualifications report from UCAS to the sector. The annual report would be written by UCAS and endorsed by the qualifications advisory group prior to publication.

11.3 This report would:

- exploit the detailed information in the QIPs
- identify trends in admissions practice (including use of international qualifications)
- provide a strategic forward view of qualification policy developments
- raise awareness of relevant new qualifications or substantial changes to existing qualifications
- report on the work of the qualifications advisory group

- recommend qualifications to be demand rated in the future (based on the analysis of the qualifications applicants are applying with).

Recommendation 5

The Qualifications Information Review recommends the provision of a UCAS annual report on the use of qualifications within HE admissions

Consultation Questions

- To what extent do you agree, in principle, with the recommendation for UCAS to produce an annual report on the use of qualifications within HE admissions?
- How would this recommendation affect you/your organisation?
- To what extent does this recommendation support fairness, transparency and efficiency in HE admissions?
- Please share any comments you have on the scope of the report.
- When in the academic year should this report be published so that it can be most helpful in supporting HE admissions?
- What guidance and communications support would be necessary to support implementation of this recommendation?

12 Recommendation 6: Optional admissions tools

12.1 Many HEIs already set entry requirements and make offers on a grade only basis. However, for those HEIs that wish to set more flexible entry requirements or make more flexible qualification offers, UCAS could offer optional admissions tools to enable this, if the demand is there.

12.2 These tools could draw from information such as qualification size and demand included in the QIPs. HEIs would need to consider QIPs in order to establish whether any subject-specific requirements had been met.

12.3 An online 'app' could be made available to enable an HEI to translate a standard A level offer (without a subject component) automatically into comparable offers in relation to other qualifications and qualification combinations.

For example:

College A has previously set entry requirements at 180 Tariff points or DDD at A level for a course. Under the new system this college would select its standard offer in terms of the qualifications of its choice and input this into the online calculator. This would generate a range of alternative offers which are equivalent in terms of qualification size and demand.

12.4 Where offers include a subject component, HEIs will continue to specify acceptable alternative qualifications, as under current arrangements. HEIs have indicated that the provision of QIPs will provide them with easier access to the information they need to make these judgements.

12.5 Similarly a tool could be provided to enable HEIs to evaluate the achievements of learners with mixed qualification portfolios to check whether they had met requirements for programme size (i.e. number and size of courses and qualifications taken) as well as level of achievement (i.e. comparable qualification grades).

For example:

University X regularly recruits students with BTEC Nationals onto its undergraduate business degree course with DDM. An admissions tutor has received an application from a candidate with a mixed profile of qualifications and wishes to establish what would be an appropriate offer for this candidate. By entering the applicant's qualifications into the online calculator the admissions tutor would be able to establish whether they have met the requirements in terms of qualification size and demand.

Recommendation 6

The Qualifications Information Review recommends the provision of optional admissions tools for those HEIs wishing to make more flexible grade-based offers, subject to consultation with the sector.

Consultation Questions

- To what extent do you agree, in principle, with the recommendation for UCAS to provide optional admissions tools for HEIs that wish to use them?
- How would this recommendation affect you/your organisation?
- To what extent does this recommendation support fairness, transparency and efficiency in HE admissions?
- Would you/your organisation want to use such tools within admissions?
- What guidance and communications support would be necessary to support implementation of this recommendation?

13 Realising the full potential of the review outcomes

- 13.1 UCAS is conscious that it is proposing changes to the Tariff and other qualifications services at a time when significant changes in qualifications and qualifications delivery are in train in Scotland (via the Curriculum for Excellence) and that there are reviews of the examination system and potential changes in qualifications underway in Wales and England. We believe the changes we are proposing to our qualifications services will help those involved in admissions to HE to navigate these changes effectively and offer sufficient flexibility to accommodate future changes in qualifications and/or examination systems in the UK.
- 13.2 As noted under Recommendation 1, a number of stakeholders have indicated that they would like any new UCAS qualifications information system to be expanded to encompass some level 2 qualifications. Although the review is not intending to incorporate level 2 qualifications initially, views are sought on the demand for comparable information on level 2 qualifications for HE admissions purposes.
- 13.3 Through both the QIR and the UCAS Admissions Process Review, learners and their advisers have been clear that they want more information and greater transparency about entry requirements and how institutions use qualifications to inform offers and decision-making. UCAS will therefore use this intelligence and the outcomes from the consultation in concert with the Admissions Process Review to add value to products and services that

UCAS provides to learners and advisers and to universities and colleges. For example, UCAS will look to incorporate more information about qualifications use within its Course Finder service and to make qualifications information available for re-use by third party information providers.

Consultation Questions

- UCAS is committed to ensuring its products and services are strengthened in light of any agreed changes, so the benefits of the new qualifications information system are fully shared with learners, applicants, schools and colleges. Have you any comments or suggestions regarding ways in which UCAS products and services might be revised in the light of these proposals?
- Do these proposals take sufficient account of the education and HE environment in your part of the United Kingdom?
- Do you believe that the proposals outlined in this document will be sufficiently flexible to accommodate any future changes to the UK qualification and examination systems?
- Are there any additional qualifications information services that you would like UCAS to provide?

14 Implementation and resourcing

- 14.1 UCAS is keen to ensure that these proposals do not result in any increased administrative burden within HEIs, and ideally should introduce efficiency benefits by reducing duplication of effort in collecting and comparing qualifications information. Further standardisation of qualifications data should also enhance reporting and the exchange of management information between HE sector bodies.
- 14.2 UCAS will minimise the cost of implementing these proposals by re-using information from awarding bodies, regulators and existing databases. However, the transition from the current Tariff system, which is funded in part by awarding bodies, to a new system which is more closely aligned to the needs of the HE sector will inevitably mean that most of the cost of establishing and operating the new qualifications information system will need to be met by UCAS.
- 14.3 The UCAS Board has signalled that if the cost of implementing and delivering the new service cannot be met from existing resources then the additional costs could be covered by a small increase in the annual capitation fee paid by UCAS members. Views on this are welcomed.
- 14.4 UCAS has held initial discussions with Ofqual, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the Department for Education and Skills (Wales), the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (Northern Ireland) and awarding bodies. These have established that the development of QIPs and an associated database is both technically and financially

feasible. It is envisaged that the first QIPs could be delivered by September 2013 with further profiles being available by the following year. However the timing of implementation is subject to consultation and is addressed within previous consultation questions (see Recommendation 1).

Consultation Questions

- The introduction of new qualifications information services should deliver efficiency gains for HE providers. Please outline any views you have on the perceived efficiency benefits of the proposals and suggestions for how any disadvantages could be minimised.
- The cost of developing, delivering and running the new service will be met by UCAS. This means that there might need to be a small increase in the capitation fee. If you work for an HEI, would your institution be willing to pay a small increase for access to this enhanced service?
- If the proposals are agreed, UCAS plans to support implementation through a comprehensive, long-term engagement programme aimed at HE admissions staff, learners and their advisers. We would welcome comments on the particular needs of different stakeholder groups, especially more mature learners and those learners who have limited access to high quality information and advice.

Section IV: The consultation

15 Consultation process

- 15.1 All recommendations address those issues raised by stakeholders in the evidence gathering phase. Prior to the formal consultation, UCAS actively engaged in an informal dialogue with key stakeholders on key recommendations to obtain initial evidence and gain an understanding of the issues that needed to be raised in the consultation.
- 15.2 The review wishes to consult widely on these proposals and welcomes feedback from all stakeholders on the extent to which the proposals support fairness, transparency and efficiency in HE admissions. The consultation questions are included in this consultation document.
- 15.3 UCAS believes that the first three recommendations will be of interest to a wide range of stakeholders whilst recommendations four to six are of a more operational nature and may be of greater interest to those working within HE.
- 15.4 A response format that highlights key questions for different stakeholder groups is available from the UCAS Qualifications Information Review webpage. Online responses are encouraged.
- 15.5 A full Equality Impact Assessment (EQUIA) will be carried out when all responses to the consultation have been received.
- 15.6 PDF versions of this document and the response document in Welsh are available to download from the review webpages (www.ucas.com/qireview).

16 How to respond

- 16.1 All consultation questions are found in the main body of the text in the section to which they refer. It is hoped you will find this helpful as you consider your responses.
- 16.2 You may respond to the consultation online at www.ucas.com/qireview where you will find full instructions on how to respond.
- 16.3 Responses should be received no later than Monday 16 April 2012.

17 Consultation events

- 17.1 In addition to this consultation document UCAS is also running a number of consultation events across the UK.
- 17.2 To find out more about these events and to register your interest in attending please see details on the review web pages (www.ucas.com/qireview).



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