

July 2012



Qualifications Information Review

**FINDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

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 report on the outcomes of the Qualifications Information Review.

This report summarises the responses to the Qualifications Information Review consultation and explains the recommendations and next steps agreed by the UCAS Board at its meeting in June 2012. We believe that implementing these recommendations will deliver real benefits to learners, teachers and advisers, and higher education institutions (HEIs) by providing better, more consistent, comparable, and searchable information about qualifications to inform admissions to higher education (HE).

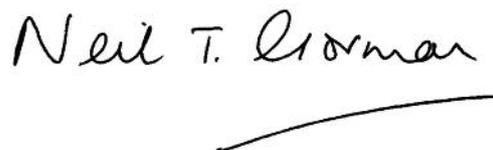
The recommendations and outcomes outlined in this report are focused on enabling fair, transparent and efficient admissions. They envisage the development and enhancement of UCAS qualifications information products and services to help students understand what qualifications are accepted for different courses, and to assist HE admissions staff in understanding the nature and content of different qualifications.

These recommendations recognise both the autonomy that institutions have in relation to their admissions and the diversity of admissions practice across the HE sector, and emphasise the importance of UCAS' working in partnership with the qualification regulators and awarding organisations to ensure the provision of appropriate, comparable and robust qualifications information. In addition, UCAS is conscious of the significant changes to qualifications provision and regulation which are underway or being proposed in the different

countries of the UK. UCAS is working closely with the key stakeholders in these areas and is confident that this set of recommendations is sufficiently flexible to accommodate whatever changes may be implemented.

UCAS will now work with universities and colleges to define detailed requirements in a number of areas and will establish a joint project with qualification regulators.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this project over the last two years, especially my colleagues on the Qualifications Information Review Steering Group and the Qualifications Information Review team at UCAS.



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

1. Executive summary

Information about qualifications is a fundamental component of the HE admissions process. Although institutions consider a wide range of factors in making admissions decisions such as an applicant's potential to benefit from their proposed course of study, the contribution that the individual could make to the institution and contextual considerations, information about qualifications is a primary determinant in decision-making.

Qualifications information informs the minimum entry requirements for individual courses, the decisions that learners make in applying to HE, and the decisions that institutions make in relation to interviews, offers of a place, and ultimately acceptance or not of an individual student.

As the provider of the UK's shared admissions service, UCAS currently offers a range of qualifications information services, including the UCAS Tariff (an optional qualifications comparison service), various publications and online information to help students understand which qualifications are accepted for various courses and to assist HE admissions staff in understanding the nature and content of different qualifications.

In 2010 the UCAS Board launched the Qualifications Information Review in response to concerns raised by HEIs about the need for better information on the growing number of qualifications being presented by applicants to HE, the ability of the UCAS Tariff to cope with the increasing diversity of qualifications, as well as the use of the Tariff for purposes for which it was not designed. The aims of this review were to:

- understand and articulate what requirements learners, institutions and other stakeholders have for information about qualifications to enable fair, transparent and efficient admissions to HE
- 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.

Following an extensive period of analysis, research and engagement with the HE sector and qualifications stakeholders, UCAS issued the Qualifications Information Review consultation in February 2012. This consultation sought views on six recommendations based upon the qualification information needs identified by HEIs, schools, colleges and advisers and applicants to HE. These recommendations were:

1. the development of Qualification Information Profile (QIPs) to give admissions staff the information they need about qualifications
2. that HEIs consider the gradual withdrawal of the UCAS Tariff for setting entry requirements and making offers
3. the development of a rigorous means of comparing 'demand' across different qualifications
4. the development of a simple qualifications metric for management information purposes
5. the publication of an annual report on the use of qualifications within HE admissions
6. the provision of optional admissions tools for HEIs.

The consultation received an excellent response from stakeholders across the education sector, with many organisations and individuals making thoughtful and detailed responses. The consultation responses broadly supported the recommendations albeit with further dialogue and development needed in a number of areas.

In particular, whilst there was considerable support for the gradual phasing out of the current UCAS Tariff (recommendation 2), 19.3% of the HE respondents to the consultation wanted to retain the Tariff for setting entry requirements and making offers. The Board has asked UCAS to engage with these HEIs to understand further the challenges and issues that they would face if this recommendation were to be implemented, and what solutions and support could be provided. The UCAS Board will make a decision on this recommendation in the autumn; all other recommendations were approved by the UCAS Board at its meeting in June 2012.

The consultation responses also emphasised the need for UCAS and the regulatory authorities to work in partnership to develop and deliver a number of the recommendations. This dependency on partnership working does have an impact on the timescales for implementation. After discussions with partners throughout the summer UCAS will be able to share more detailed timescales for development and delivery of the review outcomes in the autumn.

2. Introduction

In 2010, the UCAS Board launched the Qualifications Information Review in response to concerns raised by universities and colleges about the need for better information on the growing number of qualifications being presented by applicants to HE, the ability of the UCAS Tariff to cope with the increasing diversity of qualifications, and the use of the Tariff for purposes for which it was not designed. The aims of this review were to:

- understand and articulate what requirements learners, institutions and other stakeholders have for information about qualifications to enable fair, transparent and efficient admissions to HE
- 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.

Following an extensive period of analysis, research and engagement with the HE sector and qualifications stakeholders, UCAS issued the Qualifications Information Review consultation document in February 2012.

The consultation was the culmination of the work of the review team and Steering Group and represents a comprehensive review of the qualification information needs of HEIs, schools, colleges and advisers and applicants to HE.

The UCAS Qualifications Information Review consultation outlined six recommendations which together form a new and comprehensive shared qualifications information service for HEIs, schools, colleges, advisers and learners. These recommendations were based on the extensive evidence generated from the review's information gathering phase, subsequent model development and feedback from the sector.

The consultation provided UCAS with the opportunity to understand better the appetite for change and priorities for improvement with respect to the qualifications information provided to the sector.

3. Consultation exercise

The Qualifications Information Review consultation was launched on 9 February and officially closed on 16 April 2012, though stakeholders were given until 23 April or just over 10 weeks in which to respond. Printed copies of the consultation document were sent to UK Vice-Chancellors and other key stakeholders. The document and access to the online response form and supporting papers were all made available online.

In addition, a series of consultation workshops were held throughout March. Eighteen events were held which were attended by 169 stakeholders. These included representatives from:

- 53 HEIs
- 46 schools, colleges and advisers
- 29 learners
- 31 awarding organisations and sector skills councils (SSCs)
- 10 government, regulatory and funding bodies.

Written responses were received by email and post in addition to those submitted using the online survey tool. A good response rate was achieved across all stakeholder groups with 317 written responses received from:

- 113 HEIs and representative bodies
- 130 schools, colleges and advisers
- 25 learners
- 31 awarding organisations and SSCs
- 8 government, regulatory and funding bodies
- 10 other.

There was some overlap between participation in workshops and written respondents.

The responses were analysed by recommendation, stakeholder type and, where appropriate, country to identify key themes and issues.

The full analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative questions is available to download from the review web pages: www.ucas.com/qireview.

4. Feedback on consultation responses

This section identifies the main themes arising from feedback on the six consultation recommendations and highlights key issues by stakeholder group. The recommendations are outlined and main themes summarised below.

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. QIPs will initially focus on UK-regulated level 3 (and equivalent) qualifications and selected international qualifications (including the International Baccalaureate).*

“QIPs would provide a useful single version of the truth” (University Alliance member HEI, England)

88.8% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 5.3% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Within mission groups the proportions of those agreeing or strongly agreeing ranged from 100% to 65.5%. 93.6% of all HEIs responding to the question agreed or strongly agreed with the recommendation in principle.

Summary of findings

QIPs were generally welcomed as an improvement on current arrangements. There was general support for standardising and improving information about qualifications and recognition that this would lead to increased transparency. There was a strong view amongst HEIs that having a single central point of access to information about qualifications would save them a lot of time and offer considerable efficiency savings. An intuitive, searchable, web-based database/application would also allow HEIs to understand components within qualifications and compare components across different qualifications.

In terms of impact, respondents highlighted that understanding more about the range of qualifications that candidates may hold would be likely to enable better-informed offers to be made. QIPs are likely to have their greatest impact in relation to less familiar qualifications. However any impact on fairness, transparency and efficiency will depend not only on availability of information but how this is used by HEIs.

Proposed breadth of coverage

The breadth of coverage of the proposed QIPs was seen as an advantage and there was strong support for the inclusion of EU and international qualifications alongside UK level 3 (and equivalent) qualifications. There was also support for a means of identifying potential overlap between different qualifications.

The inclusion of profiles for Access to HE courses and apprenticeship frameworks was also widely welcomed. It was felt that it would be important that these profiles recognise the distinctiveness of these routes into HE and that separate profiles would be needed for each UK country to recognise the diversity of provision available.

For HEIs the value of level 2 (or equivalent) qualifications information was chiefly limited to the core subjects of English, mathematics and science; concerns were raised about the academic rigour of equivalent level 2 qualifications and how these equivalences are agreed. Some schools, colleges and advisers expressed concerns about how information about level 2 qualifications might be used by HEIs.

Proposed content

Where possible it was generally felt that QIPs should focus on objective information rather than subjective judgements. Overall there was strong support for including more information on assessment, grade distributions and re-sits, as well as qualification structure and content, and links to awarding organisation specifications.

There was general support for the inclusion of more information on 'skills' within QIPs, particularly research and study skills, employability and team-working skills. Personal skills were highly valued although it was felt that they were perhaps better evidenced through personal statements than qualification profiles.

There was less support from respondents for the inclusion of information about admissions tests. Some respondents highlighted the desirability of including level 4 (or equivalent) qualifications where these provided common routes of progression to HE (for example HND, DipHE and some vocational qualifications).

Many respondents observed that the usefulness of QIPs would be limited by the quality and currency of information that they contained and suggested that UCAS work with the qualification regulators to strengthen the information they hold about qualifications.

Concerns were raised about the likelihood that the demand of qualifications (see recommendation 3) would overshadow other key information within QIPs. It was felt that this could disadvantage vocational qualifications in particular.

Proposed implementation

Whilst many respondents thought QIPs should be made available as soon as possible, some urged caution and suggested that QIPs should be launched after improvements to the quality of qualifications information had been achieved. The introduction of QIPs should be phased over a period of time to allow learners making qualifications choices, advisers supporting these learners, and HE providers making admissions decisions, sufficient time to understand and utilise the new system. High quality and timely communications would be needed to support the introduction of QIPs to ensure that they were understood by all and did not disadvantage learners. It was felt that individual HEIs would need to provide clear information to candidates about how they would be making use of the information within QIPs.

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.*

63.5% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 16.1% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Awarding organisations councils/SSCs were least likely (37.9%) to agree or strongly agree. 69.7% of HEIs agreed or strongly agreed with the recommendation in principle.

Over two thirds of HE respondents agreed with this proposal, most of whom already make grade- and qualification-based offers or are moving towards them so this recommendation did not represent a significant change in practice. These HEIs welcomed proposals as supporting HE autonomy over admissions processes and reducing the likelihood of Tariff-based challenges to HE admissions decisions.

Despite this overall level of support, a number of concerns were raised by all stakeholder groups.

Summary of findings

It was widely felt that qualification- and grade-based entry requirements and offers are clearer and more transparent for learners and offer those HE providers who actively select applicants for their courses greater control over admissions.

For HEIs who use the Tariff for setting entry requirements and making offers the recommendation was generally not supported: these HEIs found the Tariff useful in attracting learners with a diverse range of qualifications, making flexible offers, and managing their admissions processes. These institutions were also particularly concerned about the workload and costs involved in transferring from a Tariff-based to a grade-based system (eg disruption to current processes and staff training and development) and expressed concerns that the withdrawal of the Tariff would prevent them from managing their admissions operations in the way that best suited their mission and context.

There was strong feedback across the range of stakeholders regarding the need for comprehensive, consistent and clear HE course entry requirements and the need to highlight qualification relevance where this was important.

A number of stakeholders expressed concerns that qualification- and grade-based entry requirements could lead to a narrowing of the pre-university curriculum, as schools and colleges prioritised the delivery of those qualifications and subjects that most commonly featured in HE requirements and moved away from qualifications that were less explicit within these requirements, eg additional subjects and qualifications for enrichment (which may also have been valued previously as a source of additional Tariff points).

Concerns were repeatedly expressed by those that use the Tariff within HE and representatives from schools and colleges that a loss of flexibility (arising from the withdrawal of the Tariff) may impact on the fairness of the system, particularly in relation to middle ability and widening participation learners whose qualifications or combination of qualifications may not be explicitly referenced within HEI entry requirements.

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.*

“We are looking at a wide range of qualifications that are designed to develop specific combinations of skills within specific progression paths and learning contexts. This cannot be reduced to one measure.” (Sixth Form College, England)

63.5% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 13.5% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. The level of agreement was significantly lower amongst awarding organisations (31.0% agreed or strongly agreed). 70.6% of HEIs agreed or strongly agreed with the recommendation in principle. Some HEIs regarded the Tariff as already providing an adequate measure of breadth and depth of applicants’ achievements for their admissions purposes and therefore did not support this recommendation.

A number of important issues were raised consistently across all stakeholder groups, which would need to be resolved before the recommendation could be agreed in practice.

Summary of findings

The majority of respondents would value information on qualification demand separately from measures of qualification size. However there was considerable disagreement on how qualification demand should be defined.

Whilst many respondents would welcome information on the academic demand represented by a qualification, others saw this as one element within a broader measure of demand, recognising the value of a wider range of skills. It was felt that a narrow focus on academic demand would risk devaluing qualifications that aim to provide progression to employment as well as HE, and that any measure of qualification demand taken in isolation was unlikely to highlight the relevance of qualifications for particular HE courses. Respondents reflected that communications would need to explain that this would mean that certain qualifications/subjects would be valued more highly in relation to some HE courses than others (even where their demand rating was the same).

Many respondents commented on the likely difficulty of securing agreement on a single rating of ‘demand’ across the HE sector. Overall it was felt that a broader definition of demand was needed to meet the information needs of the wide range of HEIs.

Some HEIs believed that levels of demand differ within qualification families ie between subjects of the same qualification (particularly A levels and BTEC Nationals). Addressing this fundamental issue was seen as the responsibility of the qualification regulators and this would need to be resolved prior to the development of any new demand measures.

More generally, some respondents felt that there was a lack of information from awarding organisations and the regulators on what grading represented within less familiar qualifications and how grades compared across level 3 (and equivalent) qualifications.

Many respondents felt that admissions tutors would be likely to consider the demand of qualifications before other information within qualification profiles, particularly if this were expressed as a numerical score; there were concerns that demand measures would overshadow other information contained within QIPs.

There were a number of concerns expressed about the use of the CRAS methodology¹ in determining academic demand. The subjectivity of the CRAS approach was highlighted as problematic, as well as the perception that it did not consider fitness for purpose in relation to non-traditional qualifications. This was seen by some as a more appropriate approach for measuring the demand of individual assessment items rather than whole qualifications.

A number of respondents suggested that the time was not right to develop new demand measures given the turbulent strategic environment, in particular changes to A levels and student number controls.

Recommendation 4: *The provision of a simple qualifications metric for management information (rather than the purposes of offer making).*

This recommendation was targeted at those working in HE. The majority of HE respondents agreed in principle with the creation of a simple qualifications metric for management information purposes. Feedback suggested that most saw management information measures as essential (or at least unavoidable) and hence wanted these measures to be robust and comprehensive.

Support for a metric was largely contingent upon the way in which recommendation 3 (means of comparing demand) would be implemented.

Summary of findings

Concerns were expressed that a measure based on academic demand would devalue vocational qualifications and may impact on HEIs' league table positions, widening participation, student recruitment and learner behaviour. Less than a third of HEIs who responded to the question agreed that such a qualifications metric should be based on measures of academic demand and qualification size alone.

The general view was that, given the diversity of HE, agreement on a more broad-based definition of qualification demand would be necessary before any new metric could be developed. Any new metric would need to provide comprehensive coverage of all qualifications for management information purposes.

HEIs would welcome clear consistency across HEFCE student number control qualification equivalencies and those resulting from any new UCAS measures.

Some respondents commented on the need for HEIs to be able to consider qualification metrics in conjunction with contextual information for the purpose of meeting widening participation objectives.

Some also suggested that guided learning hours (glh) were an unreliable measure of learning volume² and that this should be addressed by the qualification regulators prior to the development of new measures.

Most respondents acknowledged the likelihood that measures developed for management information would be used for other purposes, particularly within admissions, recruitment, league tables and other reporting.

¹Complexity, resources, abstractness and strategy (CRAS) methodology was suggested in the consultation document as a starting point for independent criteria that could be used for the evaluation of qualifications. CRAS methodology is currently used by Ofqual in its evaluation of international qualifications (International Comparisons in Senior Secondary Assessment, Ofqual Feb 2011 Ofqual/11/4814).

²Note that Scottish qualifications validated by SQA use notional learning hours (nlh) as their indication of volume.

Recommendation 5: *The publication of a UCAS annual report on the use of qualifications within HE admissions.*

This recommendation was targeted at those working in HE. Respondents largely agreed in principle to this recommendation, recognising that increased and improved data about the use of qualifications in HE admissions would be a useful and valuable resource and would save them considerable research time.

However, concerns were raised that presenting information about patterns of accepted qualifications could reinforce historical trends, encouraging a narrowing of the pre-HE qualifications market and undermining widening participation by discouraging learners with less-familiar qualifications. Some felt that this might impact on the level 3 (or equivalent) qualifications developed by awarding organisations, the courses and qualifications offered by schools and colleges, and the take up of courses/qualifications by learners. Respondents stressed the need to recognise that new level 3 (or equivalent) qualifications could also be valuable for progression to HE.

Recommendation 6: *If there is demand from HEIs, the development of optional admissions tools.*

This recommendation was targeted at those working in HE. Although there was general support for the recommendation, less than half of HEIs indicated that they would use these tools; many commented that they would withhold judgement until more detail about the underpinning measures was available. A number of HEIs suggested that such tools may encourage a mechanistic and over-simplified approach to HE admissions. However such tools would be unnecessary if the Tariff were retained.

Realising the full potential of the review outcomes: *UCAS 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.*

Comments from HEIs with regards to improvements to UCAS products and services related primarily to the use of data. These included:

- improvements to the capture of data including the consistent coding of qualifications across all systems
- releasing of applications only when all qualification information fields are completed
- links from the qualifications in applications to QIPs
- the requirement for the provision of data only once and linking up of UCAS systems
- expanding the scope of QIPs to include international and European qualifications.

In terms of improvements for applicants and their advisers, comments included suggestions for:

- products that are geared to the non-traditional learner
- the more intelligent use of data including information about the rates of progression to HE from various different qualifications to help inform students in making the choice of which qualifications would best support their aspirations.

5. Putting our findings into context

An important contextual issue that informs the recommendations is the increasingly diverse pattern of educational provision and policy across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the need for any proposals to address adequately this diversity and provide solutions that are sufficiently flexible to cope with future changes. It is therefore important that the recommendations fully take these differences into account and provide HEIs with the information tools they need to navigate these systems successfully.

The following strategic and contextual issues are highlighted because of their potential impact on the HE admissions system:

- **The number and diversity of pre-university qualifications available** was identified as an issue by many respondents. It is likely that this pattern of provision will continue. Whilst proposed A level reforms in England could lead to changes in the range of A level subjects available and their uptake, it may also encourage awarding organisations to develop new qualifications in subjects. At pre-16 the implementation of the Wolf Review recommendations in England is likely to change the nature of vocational programmes and apprenticeships available to many 16-19 year olds. The possible reforms of GCSEs and any impact this may have on the 16-19 landscape is also yet to be understood. These pre-16 reforms may lead to a reduction of the range of qualifications held by English 16-19 year olds applying to HE. However in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there are policies to increase the breadth of qualification types offered to young people³. And adult learners will continue to have qualification needs that will not be directly covered by 14-19 initiatives.
- **The reform of A levels** could be a significant issue for many HE providers (although less so in Scotland); A level qualifications were held by 83% of UCAS applicants aged 19 and under domiciled in England, Wales or Northern Ireland in 2011. Under the proposed reforms universities and learned societies will be encouraged to become more engaged in A level development, working with awarding organisations on developing the content, assessment and grading of A levels. It is possible that new A levels (potentially available from September 2014) could cover a narrower range of subjects, and could include fewer modules, fewer re-sit opportunities, more linear assessment as well as less predictable content in assessment. At this moment it is unclear whether Northern Ireland and Wales will offer the reformed A levels.
- **The standards debate:** Ofqual, the qualification regulator for England, has recently acknowledged declining levels of examination demand in relation to a number of A level subjects⁴. Erosion of confidence in a common A level standard is troubling for those involved in university admissions. The ability to use A levels as a common currency (eg asking for three A levels, with perhaps only one subject specified), is important both for efficient offer-making and for enabling fair access where individuals' access to particular A level subjects at school or college cannot be guaranteed. Adequate regulation of standards is critical to HEI confidence in the qualifications that applicants hold.

³The Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland will lead to applicants presenting a more diverse range of qualifications on application to HE. As outlined: "Under Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), schools will be implementing a diverse range of learner journeys in the Senior Phase. Learners' opportunities to achieve qualifications in particular years of the Senior Phase will depend on how their school has chosen to structure this aspect of CfE, and many learners will be spreading Highers and other qualifications over several years. Examples provided by Education Scotland, some of which are referred to in this report, illustrate this diversity. Universities will not be able to assume that there is a single 'normal' model of when students are presented for Highers, or that learners will, for example, necessarily have the opportunity to study for a full range of Highers in a single year." Beyond the Senior Phase: University Engagement with Curriculum for Excellence, Universities Scotland, May 2012

⁴Review of Standards reports, Ofqual

- **Timing issues:** The Qualifications Information Review has taken place at a time of significant change for the secondary and HE sectors. In particular it is important that the implementation of review recommendations be timed to take account of the implementation of the UCAS Admissions Process Review recommendations, the reform of A levels in England, the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland, and other changes in qualifications and HE policy.
- **Qualifications metric and number control issues:** The HE sector, policy makers and funding bodies need a metric that allows for the comparison of qualifications (and grades within them) in terms of their relative volume and demand. Such metrics are needed to support the statutory reporting of entry qualifications. Therefore, funding bodies and HESA will need to be involved in any work to develop improved measures of equivalencies of qualifications.

6. Final recommendations and outcomes

The overarching principles behind the recommendations are that any changes should increase transparency, fairness and efficiency within HE admissions. Central to the final recommendations outlined below is the proposal that there are a number of fundamental issues that need to be addressed directly by the qualification regulators across the United Kingdom.

A key issue that informs the recommendations is the increasingly diverse pattern of educational provision and policy across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The section below sets out the recommendations that were agreed by the UCAS Board in June 2012, together with the further action required.

Recommendation 1: *The development of UCAS Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs) and an associated database.*

This recommendation was widely supported by all stakeholders and UCAS proposes to take forward the development and delivery of QIPs and the provision of a search interface.

UCAS will:

- work with the qualification regulators and awarding organisations to secure access to existing data about qualifications
- proceed with the development of QIPs and the associated database
- work with the regulators to drive up the quality and coverage of qualifications data by sharing evidence received from the consultation including information about the comparability of standards within and across qualification families, concerns about reliability of guided learning hours (glh) as an appropriate measure of qualification size, and the need for comparable information on assessment and qualification type.

Timescales for development and delivery of the QIPs will be reliant in part on close partnership with the UK qualification regulators. The regulators' internal timescales and external policy factors may also have an influence on the final agreed timescales for this work. UCAS will be able to share timescales for development and delivery in the autumn. Timescales will include the development of QIPs for level 3 (and equivalent) qualifications, selected international and EU qualifications, Access to HE Diplomas and apprenticeship frameworks.

Recommendation 2: *The gradual withdrawal of the use of UCAS Tariff points for setting entry requirements and making admissions offers and decisions.*

There was widespread support for the view that grade- and qualification-based entry requirements and offers promote an understanding of qualification relevance and suitability for progression to HE and are more transparent to learners. There was also strong feedback across the range of stakeholders regarding the need for greater clarity and consistency across HE course entry requirements.

It is clear however, that a minority of HEIs value the flexibility the Tariff offers within HE admissions and wish to retain the Tariff for setting entry requirements and making offers⁵.

The Board has therefore asked UCAS to engage with those institutions who have indicated a strong preference for using the Tariff for setting entry requirements and making offers to understand more fully the challenges of moving to a qualification- and grade-based approach, and what support would be needed. This dialogue will also explore the options for maintaining a Tariff system for the short and medium term and the engagement that UCAS would require from these institutions in order to support this.

It should also be noted that if the proposed A level reforms in England are implemented, many of those applying to HE from September 2016 could have A levels that differ significantly from the qualification benchmarks that currently underpin the Tariff⁶. Similarly there are changes to the Scottish Higher and Advanced Highers scheduled during this period. This would bring into question the validity and reliability of current Tariff point allocations after 2016.

The UCAS Board will take a decision on the future of the Tariff in September following further dialogue with UCAS members.

Irrespective of the outcome of this decision UCAS will:

- work with partners to develop good practice and guidance to support HEIs who wish to move away from using Tariff points for setting entry requirements and offer-making
- work with partners to provide better information to learners and advisers to address common misconceptions and misunderstandings about the use of Tariff points in setting entry requirements and offer-making
- whilst recognising HE autonomy over the admissions process, support the provision of more detailed information about entry requirements through improvements to UCAS' own products and services.

UCAS will start working on the development of this good practice and guidance in the autumn and will be working closely with HEIs to draw on their experiences to inform the development of these support materials.

Recommendation 3: *The development of a rigorous means of comparing qualification demand.*

There was strong feedback that HEIs would value information on how qualifications compare in terms of demand. Whilst many would welcome information on the academic demand represented by a qualification, others see this as one element within a broader measure of demand, which would recognise the value of a wider range of skills. It was felt that a narrow focus on academic demand would risk devaluing qualifications that aim to provide progression to employment as well as HE.

⁶ Concerns about the appropriateness of the current Tariff methodology, the high costs of evaluating submissions and its declining use within HE admissions detailed in previous papers have led the QIR to recommend reforming the basis of the Tariff and the introduction of a new qualifications metric rather than amending the existing process.

Some concerns were expressed about the use of the CRAS methodology in determining academic demand. The subjectivity of the CRAS approach was highlighted as problematic, as was the perception that it does not consider fitness for purpose in relation to non-traditional qualifications. The CRAS methodology was seen by some as a more appropriate approach for measuring the demand of individual assessment items rather than whole qualifications.

A number of respondents expressed concerns regarding a lack of consistency of standards within qualifications (and across qualification families), which would undermine the value of any demand measures; this was seen as an issue that should rightly be addressed by the qualification regulators.

UCAS will:

- seek agreement from the qualification regulators to collaborate on the development of improved information about qualification demand that captures the range of skills and achievements valued across HE, in addition to academic demand. This could form the basis of any new arrangements for supporting entry requirements and offer-making in the medium term.

Timescales for development will be reliant on close partnership working with the UK qualification regulators, whose own internal timescales and external policy factors may also influence the final agreed timescales of this work. UCAS will be able to share more detailed timescales for development and delivery of the review outcomes in the autumn.

Recommendation 4: *The provision of a simple qualifications metric for management information purposes (rather than for the purposes of entry requirements and offer-making).*

There is a clearly identified need from the HE sector, policy makers and funding bodies for a metric that allows for the comparison of qualifications for management information and reporting purposes. This will need to be based on robust measures of qualification demand and qualification size and the timing of implementation of this recommendation is dependent on recommendation 3 outcomes. Therefore the UCAS Tariff will remain the basis for management information measures across the HE sector until new measures are available.

UCAS will:

- work with HE providers and with HESA, HE funding bodies and other organisations to understand fully the requirements for a new management information metric that meets the needs of the sector and is based on new measures of qualification demand (broad measure of demand) and size. UCAS will also work with partner organisations to agree the process and timescales for the development and delivery of a new qualifications metric.

Timescales for the development of any new management information metric will be dependent on the timescales from outcomes with respect to recommendation 3. UCAS will be able to share more detailed timescales for development and delivery of the review outcomes in the autumn.

Recommendation 5: *The publication of a UCAS annual report on the use of qualifications within HE admissions.*

There was considerable support for UCAS to maximise its information resources for the benefit of the sector. Recommendation 5 was widely supported in principle; it was felt that an annual report would provide HEIs with valuable information about the use of qualifications within admissions, which was seen as potentially useful in informing admissions and supporting efficiency.

UCAS will:

- develop and publish an annual report on qualifications and progression to HE that meets the needs of the HE sector.

UCAS will be able to share more detailed timescales for development and delivery of the annual report in the autumn.

Recommendation 6: *If there is demand from HEIs, the development of optional admissions tools.*

Although there was general support for the recommendation, many noted that this was contingent upon what information was available in the QIPs and on the development of measures of demand.

UCAS will:

- work with members who want to continue using equivalency metrics for setting entry requirements and offer-making after 2016⁷ to determine what tools could be provided to support institutional requirements. This will include looking at the viability of using any new measures of qualification demand and size for admissions purposes.

⁷ The implementation of A level reforms may mean that many of those applying to HE for September 2016 could have A levels that are markedly different from those upon which the current Tariff scores and equivalencies are based. It is therefore intended that a revised metric would replace the use of Tariff points for management information and research purposes by or before year of entry 2016.

7. Implementation planning

Taking forward these recommendations will deliver real benefits to learners, teachers and advisers and HEIs including:

- The provision of clearer information to learners, teachers and advisers about the qualifications required and preferred by HEIs as preparation for progression to various courses of HE study. This should help more applicants make the right choices for the right reasons.
- The provision of better, more consistent, comparable and searchable information about qualifications to admissions staff. This will reduce the amount of time that admissions staff spend researching and comparing less familiar qualifications, contributing to efficiency gains, enabling more consistent decision-making and supporting widening participation efforts.

UCAS is developing a detailed implementation plan to take forward the recommendations outlined in this report. This is dependent in part on ongoing dialogue with, and agreement from the qualification regulators and UCAS will be able to share more detailed timescales for development and delivery of the review outcomes, including the governance and any working groups that need to be set up to support this implementation, in the autumn.

UCAS will take these recommendations forward through the New Qualifications Information System (NQIS) project.



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