

UCAS

# 2025 DATES AND DEADLINES CONSULTATION

OCTOBER 2023



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# INTRODUCTION

Every year, UCAS supports 1.5 million students to explore entering higher education, employment and apprenticeships. Of those who choose to pursue higher education in the UK, UCAS manages almost 3 million applications, from around 700,000 individuals.

This centralised and shared service provided by UCAS brings efficiencies for applicants as well as the higher education providers considering applications; clear transparent expectations of what the admissions journey will look like for all involved; and offers a wealth of data to help the sector understand where opportunities for improvement lie.

Underpinning this is a set of application dates and deadlines. These uphold fair admissions for home and international students, avoid a first-come-first-served approach, and allow students to make well considered and informed decisions. Response deadlines also ensure providers can give students due consideration, while students are protected from pressures to accept the earliest offers they receive.

Within this consultation, UCAS reviews the January deadline currently operating in the application process, and seeks to ensure that it continues to support providers and applicants, as well as advisers working with students. We are keen to hear as many voices as possible; from students, providers, advisers and agents, parents, charity groups and public sector bodies – we know that many people will hold views and we welcome these.



# WHEN IS THE JANUARY EQUAL CONSIDERATION DEADLINE AND WHY DOES IT NEED TO BE REVIEWED?

The last formal review of dates and deadlines was in 2016, when UCAS – via its Undergraduate Advisory Group – commissioned a sector led working group to consider the dates and deadlines on which the UCAS Undergraduate scheme (excluding Clearing) was structured, and determine whether these were still fit for purpose in meeting the needs of providers, advisers and applicants. Following engagement with the sector, the group determined that the 15 January Equal Consideration Deadline was still fit for purpose.

More recently 2021 saw the movement of the 15 January deadline to the final Wednesday of January in response to the impact of Covid 19 on schools; allowing advisers extra time to compile references and giving students extra time to finalise their choices and applications. In tandem with this, reject by default (RBD) and decline by default (DBD) deadlines were also consolidated and moved.



## What's changed?

Despite concerns that Covid 19 would affect demand for UK higher education, appetite has remained buoyant – applicants as of January 2023 were up 6% on January 2019 (the last pre-pandemic cycle). This trend is more acute for higher tariff providers, which often use more detailed recruitment and selection processes, where applications have increased by 16% during the same period.

With a rising 18 year old population and application rate, alongside growing demand from international students, UCAS **projects** that there could be up to a million higher education applicants in a single year in 2030, up from almost three quarters of a million today (+30%)<sup>1</sup>.

With demand holding strong, pushing back the January Equal Consideration Deadline in 2021 has in turn pushed the reject by default deadline (the point at which providers must have confirmed a decision back to on-time applicants) into the summer examination period. This means there is a risk that the admissions process could be a distraction to students during this period.

UCAS has been working with the sector to help providers manage the increase in workload while ensuring fair and equal consideration. Developments such as additional contextual data questions in the application, and the introduction of a more structured academic reference, are designed to help providers find the information they need to differentiate applicants faster. In future, efficiencies such as document upload at the point of application will ease administrative burdens. Additionally, UCAS is keen to explore with the sector the number of applications each student makes at any one time, with a view to minimising speculative behaviours allowing students and providers alike to focus their attention better on those applications/choices they are most interested in.

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<sup>1</sup> Journey to a Million webpage - [www.ucas.com/about-us/journey-million](https://www.ucas.com/about-us/journey-million)





## **What does this mean for 2025 entry?**

Expressing a more immediate need for support in continuing to give fair consideration to growing numbers of applicants, a number of providers and advisers have voiced requests to explore shorter term measures to support fairness for students through a review of application deadlines for 2025 entry. UCAS is keen to understand the impact of the January ECD changes made in 2021, and whether this is currently best placed to balance applicant interest and fair selection.

## **How is UCAS responding to these requests?**

UCAS recognises the need to consider the impact of any changes on applicant experience and fairness, as well as the experiences of advisers in schools and colleges who are supporting students with their applications. Initial options for future cycles have been developed through the input of UCAS' Advisers Advisory Group, Admissions Development Group, Student Advisory Group and Council. This document sets out options for the Equal Consideration Deadline. Any changes from this work will not impact the UCAS Conservatoires scheme. Views from the sector on the placement of the Equal Consideration Deadline are sought and will feed into the final set of dates and deadlines to be adopted for the 2025 entry cycle.

# THE JANUARY EQUAL CONSIDERATION DEADLINE

## What do we need to achieve?

In reviewing the January Equal Consideration deadline, UCAS wishes to understand sector feedback on the changes made in 2021, and make a positive decision about where to place this deadline from 2025 so that it:

- ▶ Brings the providers' reject by default date forward to minimise the number of students receiving rejections in the middle of their exam periods;
- ▶ Maximises the time available between application and decision deadlines to ensure providers can make fair and robust assessments and decisions;
- ▶ Offers sufficient time for advisers to support their students in meeting application deadlines, and allows students themselves to complete their applications.

A moderate approach to minimise overlap between the RBD and exam periods would be to revert to the pre-pandemic approach, where decisions on on-time applications had to be made by early May. A more radical approach could see the RBD be brought forward to the end of April. These options, with commensurate shifts to the January ECD, give rise to three approaches:

1. Maintain current January ECD (last Wednesday of January) and May RBD (second Wednesday)
2. Move January ECD to second Wednesday in January, and RBD to first Wednesday in May
3. Move January ECD, to third Wednesday in December, and RBD to last Wednesday in April

<sup>2</sup> Working days is defined here as Mondays to Fridays, excluding Bank Holidays. This calculation does not account for any school holiday/University shutdown periods.

The following table shows the number of working days<sup>2</sup> between the Equal Consideration Deadline and Reject by Default date in each option:

Option	2025 entry	2026 entry	2027 entry	2028 entry	2029 entry
1	73	73	73	73	68
2	78	78	78	78	79
3	91	91	91	91	86



## How might we expect any changes to impact students?

Having analysed when applicants complete their applications we have found:

- ▶ Applicants are mainly driven by the deadline not the date in when they complete their application, meaning a change to the January ECD would shift behaviour, but likely not cause more applicants to miss the deadline.
- ▶ In the past, changes to the January ECD have not impacted the proportion of applicants missing the deadline (who have already started their application) with this remaining constant at around 4%.
- ▶ Applicant groups with a higher likelihood of completing their application in the two weeks before the January ECD and who therefore may be most affected by a change are:
  - » Applicants applying independently.
  - » Applicants from the EU, where their home country's deadlines may no longer align with the UCAS deadline.
  - » 18-year-old applicants from specific centres (particularly Further Education Colleges) where a lot of applications are completed closer to the deadline.
  - » 18-year-old applicants sitting BTEC qualifications.
  - » Male applicants.

While this analysis points to the need for targeted support for those groups most likely to be affected by any changes, over and above any general guidance on new deadlines, it does indicate good general levels of awareness of deadlines among applicant groups, and a resilience to change.



# YOUR FEEDBACK

To help assess whether UCAS should retain the current approach to the January Equal Consideration Deadline, or adopt a new approach, we invite the following feedback:

- ▶ Please rank these options for the January equal consideration deadline and reject by default deadline in order of preference.
  - a. Maintain current January ECD (last Wednesday in January) and May RBD (second Wednesday in May)
  - b. Move January ECD to second Wednesday in January, and RBD to first Wednesday in May
  - c. Move January ECD before Christmas e.g. third Wednesday in December, and RBD to last Wednesday in April
- ▶ Do you have any additional comments about the January ECD?

**This feedback can be submitted via the survey link on [page 10](#).**



# RESPONDING TO THE PROPOSALS

UCAS welcomes feedback from all customers and stakeholders in the admissions process. Please share your views via the following link:

<https://forms.office.com/e/uMVEv1MAF2>

or by scanning the QR code below:



## Feedback timeline

**Consultation launches:** 30<sup>th</sup> October

**Consultation closes:** 24<sup>th</sup> November

**UCAS response released:** 12<sup>th</sup> December



# UCAS

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