



UCAS

International Admissions Review

Findings and Recommendations

October 2014

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Foreword

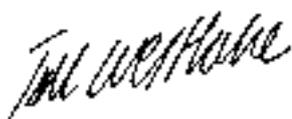
As Chair of the UCAS International Advisory Group (IAG) and the International Admissions Review (IAR) Steering Group, I am delighted to present this report on the outcomes of the IAR of UCAS' undergraduate services. This summarises the responses to the IAR consultation and outlines the recommendations and next steps agreed by the UCAS Board at its meeting in September 2014.

International students are estimated to contribute over £7 billion to the UK economy each year in fees and living expenses. As importantly, international students enrich and diversify our campuses to the benefit of all students and staff. UCAS plays a crucial role in attracting and supporting undergraduate international students through their application process. It is recognised that UCAS' services need to reflect the diversity of international recruitment practices across the higher education sector.

The IAR has focused on improving the UCAS Apply system for international applicants and supporting higher education providers' international student recruitment strategies. It is also timely, as it has coincided with UCAS embarking on a strategic programme of change to redevelop its products into a common set of services which can be configured to respond to market differences. This investment in UCAS' IT infrastructure will, in due course, support the implementation of the UCAS Apply related recommendations put forward in this report.

I am pleased that so many individuals, higher education providers and stakeholders have contributed to the detailed information gathering stage of the IAR and responded to the consultation process. The majority of responses to all 15 recommendations were positive and this has provided a clear mandate for change. In addition, through the consultation process, respondents have prioritised the recommendations in relation to the importance to them and this information has been crucial in determining the final programme of work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who contributed to the IAR and particularly members of the Steering Group for their engagement and input throughout the process. I am absolutely delighted that the outcomes of this IAR, when implemented, will provide further support to international students applying to the UK; aid those recruiting these students; and deliver efficiencies for the sector. UCAS recognises the crucial role international students play in the higher education sector and this review supports making the UK the destination of choice for these students.



Dr Tim Westlake

Chair of the International Admissions Review Steering Group
Director of the Student Experience at Manchester University

Executive summary

The International Admissions Review (IAR) of UCAS' undergraduate services comes out of the findings and recommendations of the Admissions Process Review (APR), which reported in March 2012. One of the key recommendations of the APR was 'UCAS will work through its International Advisory Group, and with appropriate sector bodies, to review the admissions process for international applicants and develop a model that takes the UK process as its basis but is tailored to the specific needs of international applicants and the higher education institutions that recruit them'.

The importance of international and EU students to UK higher education providers (HEPs) is indisputable. As such, UCAS is keen to ensure its admissions process supports providers in making the UK an attractive destination for the best students in the world. Furthermore, it is clear that UCAS, as the UK's shared admissions service, can deliver operational efficiencies to the higher education (HE) sector, which will not be realised for those operating internationally, until the concerns of international recruiters are addressed.

The aims of the International Admissions Review are to support the longer term growth and protection of the UK international and EU recruitment markets by creating:

- An international applicant user-friendly UCAS Apply system, which allows for competitive international recruitment all year round, and supports the channels through which international students are recruited, such as schools, agents and international pathway providers.
- Efficiencies in the international admissions process.
- Services which assist with the significant challenge in capturing, verifying and understanding a plethora of international qualifications.

Members of the IAR Steering Group to whom UCAS owes thanks for their engagement and input during this review include:

- **Charlie Carter**, Director of the International Office, Loughborough University and representative of British Universities International Liaison Association (BUILA)
- **Joanne Purves**, Director/Vice-President, Sheffield International, University of Sheffield
- **Thomas Veit**, Director of External Relations, University of Leicester
- **Alan McLachlan**, Assistant Director, Student & Academic Services, Edinburgh Napier University
- **Mark Barlow**, Director of Recruitment and Admissions, University of Surrey
- **Ioan Evans**, Head of Enquiries & Admissions, Deputy Director Marketing and Student Recruitment, University of South Wales

1. Responses to the review recognised the increasingly complex terminology.

Findings

Following a period of analysis, research and engagement with the sector, UCAS issued the IAR consultation in April 2014. This consultation sought views on 15 recommendations, based on the feedback to the IAR Steering Group in its information gathering phase.

The consultation received an excellent response from stakeholders across the education sector, with organisations making considered and detailed responses. The consultation responses broadly supported the recommendations, albeit with further input needed to inform development in several areas.

The key priority that emerged from HEP, applicant, school and agent feedback was for the capability to upload digital documents. This is perhaps unsurprising given the complex and diverse number of qualifications applicants present and increasing regulation by Government and its agencies.

Reviewing and revising UCAS Apply deadlines was also strongly supported. However, facilitating the ability to recruit to more than just the current autumn entry point was also allied to this support for revising deadlines.

The importance of improving the information and advice to applicants, advisers and HEP international offices was also accorded high priority. This report makes suggestions for action which will bring immediate benefits to these stakeholders.

The consultation responses also emphasised the need for UCAS to enhance its services to all applicants rather than simply to international applicants¹, with many respondents citing support for proposals only where they would be applied to all applicants. Thus, given the remit of this review, a number of the 'next steps' relating to the recommendations and their implementation are through the UCAS groups and forums, to create working groups to explore the UCAS Apply business rules, which drive it for all applicants.

Responses also stressed the need to work with the sector to ensure that the benefits of recommendations are maximised, something which should be well served by the robust groups and forums', structure now in place.

Context of proposal implementation

Important context – the wider UCAS transformational process

- UCAS has developed and is making progress towards a strategy and plan which fundamentally transforms the technical infrastructure and design of its services.
- This first stage of the strategy was to secure delivery of UCAS services over the critical summer results period in 2013. The next step was to transition the now stabilised estate towards a managed IT provider to further strengthen UCAS' technological position. This project involved selecting the globally recognised technology company, Infosys, to deliver UCAS' IT. The transition was successfully completed in April 2014.
- UCAS is now entering the period of transformation of its services. It is important to point out that much of the work on the design of the transformation has been underway for some months, although this has centred largely on developing a blue print for UCAS' services.
- This investment in UCAS' IT infrastructure will, in due course, allow for implementation of the UCAS Apply related recommendations made in this document. More information on this can be found at <http://play.buto.tv/ccMvq>.
- UCAS will be using the next 18 months to develop the future state of its products and services, which includes a rebuild of its application services. Through the IAR a clear picture of what our international customers need has emerged to inform this process.

Priority table

Given the number of changes proposed in the review, and the long term schedule for delivery, we asked respondents to rank the top five recommendations considered highest priority. This table displays prioritised recommendations calculated from the respondents' top five choices.

Priority	All	HEPs	Schools
1	 <p>Recommendation 7 Enable the upload of digital documents in UCAS Apply.</p>	 <p>Recommendation 7 Enable the upload of digital documents in UCAS Apply.</p>	 <p>Recommendation 3 Improve the information & advice available through UCAS for international and EU applicants.</p>
2	 <p>Recommendation 3 Improve information and advice available through UCAS for international and EU applicants.</p>	 <p>Recommendation 3 Improve the information & advice available through UCAS for international and EU applicants.</p>	 <p>Recommendation 2 The ability to make instant offers to international fee-paying applicants at any point in the cycle.*</p>
3	 <p>Recommendation 1 Revise current UCAS deadlines for international fee-paying applicants.</p>	 <p>Recommendation 1 Revise current UCAS deadlines for international fee-paying applicants.</p>	 <p>Recommendation 7 Enable the upload of digital documents in UCAS Apply.</p>
4	 <p>Recommendation 10 Improve the collection of qualification information in UCAS Apply and provide more information about international and EU qualifications.</p>	 <p>Recommendation 6 Enable applicants to link themselves clearly to agents and link their applications to sponsoring bodies in UCAS Apply.</p>	 <p>Recommendation 12 Attendance at overseas events to support higher education providers.</p>
5	 <p>Recommendation 6 Enable applicants to link themselves clearly to agents and link their applications to sponsoring bodies in UCAS Apply.</p>	 <p>Recommendation 10 Improve the collection of qualification information in UCAS Apply and provide more information about international and EU qualifications.</p>	 <p>Recommendation 8 Improve data collection in UCAS Apply for the purposes of fee status assessment.</p>

*It was clear from the free text responses and web chats held with schools, that 'instant offers' was mistakenly believed to be 'quick decisions' from HEPs. Qualitative feedback indicated that 'instant offers' were a practice schools would not be in support of.

Proposals and implementation

	Recommendation	Support	Delivery method
1	Revise current UCAS Apply deadlines for international fee-paying applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support mostly for revision of, rather than removal of, deadlines – particularly 15 January and 30 June, with a request from the sector for reconsideration of deadlines for all applicants (home, EU and international) Desire from HEPs for increased control of the Decline By Default (DBD) and Reject By Default (RBD) dates Reflection that a multiple start date model needs consideration alongside any revision of deadlines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services
2	The ability to make instant offers through UCAS Apply to international fee-paying applicants at any point in the cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support from HEPs but qualified by the need to understand how this would work in practice with reference to UKVI compliance and ensuring students' choices are not limited Strong support from international schools, but further investigation suggests that this was for 'quick decisions' from HEPs, not 'instant offers' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services
3	Improve the information & advice available through UCAS for EU and international applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong support for revision of terminology, improvements to ucas.com and a more personalised service for applicants Support for more UCAS engagement with HEP international offices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS Marketing and Communications Team UCAS Head of Learner Experience role created UCAS Head of HEP Experience
4	Facilitate payments from international and EU applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong support for enhanced UCAS application fee payment methods Little support for collection or facilitation of tuition fee deposits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services
5	Reconsider how the reference request is managed for international and EU students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong support to retain the reference as part of UCAS Apply but to improve the collection of these by allowing for digital uploads Support for creating a more structured template for all referees, not just those supporting international applicants and increasing information and advice to applicants and their referees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services
6	Enable applicants to link themselves clearly to agents and to link their applications to sponsoring bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for enabling all applicants (home, EU and international) to list those supporting them in their application HEP support for increased transparency, data collection and market intelligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services
7	Enable the upload of digital documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong support to build capability for digital uploads to drive efficiencies, but concern that functionality meets sector's needs, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> types of attachments fraud detection integration into existing HEP software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services
8	Improve data collection for the purposes of fee status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong support to improve data collection for the purposes of fee status to drive sector efficiencies and aid the consistency and accuracy of fee status decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services
9	Improve data collection for the purpose of visa status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong support to improve data collection for the purposes of visa status to drive sector efficiencies and in the receipt of important applicant information earlier in the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services
10	Improve the collection of qualification information in UCAS Apply and provide more information about international and EU qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong support to improve the collection of qualification information by allowing for digital uploads and creating a more responsive qualifications database for all applicants (home, EU and international) Support for expansion of information relating to international and EU qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services
11	Extend UCAS' role in verifying qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong support but concern that cost of implementation may be too great for return on investment Strong support for the addition of Secure English Language Tests (SELT) to UCAS Awarding Body Linkage (ABL) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS International ABL Working Group
12	Attend overseas events to support HEPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support but with an emphasis on training advisers, not just servicing applicants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS Head of Adviser Experience role created
13	Develop an enhanced international UCAS registered centre offer which supports overseas recruitment from schools and agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong support with clear indication that UCAS should be focused on international advisers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS Head of Adviser Experience role created
14	On-board embedded international pathway providers allied to HEPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some support with an emphasis on referrals from HEPs to allied pathway providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services
15	Establish formal relationships with key strategic partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong support but qualified by feedback that UCAS should not take a lobbying role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UCAS International and Policy Teams

Next steps

- Work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a UCAS Apply Business Rules Working Group. The review has shown a desire for further consideration of:
 - deadlines for all applicants (home, EU and international)
 - a multiple start date model
 - HEP control of DBD and RBD dates
- Seek further feedback on 24 March art & design deadline from admissions colleagues dealing with these applications
- Work through UCAS' Clearing Working Group to consider "developing a process for all applicants (either existing or new, home or international) who have not secured a place through a UCAS main-scheme application" (Clearing Working Group Terms of Reference)

- Work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a UCAS Apply Capability Working Group to consider the implications of introducing an 'instant offer' functionality for all applicants (home, EU and international)

- Work through UCAS' Marketing and Communications Team to champion the international applicant information and advice needs
- Through UCAS' Head of Learner Experience, investigate extending the ways in which applicants can contact UCAS
- Work through the UCAS Relationship Management Team to engage with colleagues in HEP international offices

- Through UCAS' Market Intelligence Team, work with international schools, applicants and agents to understand what additional methods of payment would be desirable

- Work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a UCAS Apply Functionality Working Group to consider revision of the current reference section for all applicants (home, EU and international)
- Work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a Digital Document Collection (DDC) Steering Group

- Work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a UCAS Apply Capability Working Group to consider revision of the current UCAS Apply template for all applicants (home, EU and international) and their advisers and to review the functionality of such a section in relation to agents and sponsoring bodies in particular

- Work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a Digital Document Collection (DDC) Steering Group

- Work through the UCAS Data Group to consider revision of the current UCAS Apply data capture fields relating to fee status and feed into the DDC Steering Group

- Work through the UCAS Data Group to consider revision of the current UCAS Apply data capture fields relating to visa status and feed into the DDC Steering Group

- Work through the Qualifications Advisory Group to consider revision of the current qualification capture for all applicants (home, EU and international) and feed into the DDC Steering Group
- Offer a broader range of international and EU qualifications as UCAS Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs)

- Work through the UCAS International ABL Working Group to:
 - investigate the return on investment of verifying some international qualifications
 - progress with the inclusion of SELT results

- Work through a newly created 'Head of Adviser Experience' role to develop an international advisers engagement plan as part of UCAS' adviser strategy, with an emphasis on digitally delivered training

- Work through a newly created 'Head of Adviser Experience' role to develop a strategic approach to the recruitment and maintenance of UCAS registered centres
- Develop a plan to raise the visibility of UCAS' Schools Team as a nominated point of contact for registered centres
- Work through the Relationship Management Team to promote registered centres to HEPs

- Work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a UCAS Apply Business Rules Working Group to consider the referral of applicants to their foundation providers where they are unsuitable for direct entry to year 1
- Work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a UCAS Apply Capability Working Group to consider a separate process for students progressing from pathway providers

- Work through the UCAS International Team and wider UCAS Policy Team to continue to build relationships with key strategic partners

1. Introduction

The IAR of UCAS' undergraduate services comes out of the findings and recommendations of the Admissions Process Review (APR), which reported in March 2012. One of the key recommendations of the APR was 'UCAS will work through its International Advisory Group, and with appropriate sector bodies, to review the admissions process for international applicants and develop a model that takes the UK process as its basis but is tailored to the specific needs of international applicants and the higher education institutions that recruit them'.

As the UK's shared admissions service, UCAS provides information and advice, course information, entry requirements, and application services, to around 670,000 applicants and over 370 UK HEPs each year. In 2013 over 70,000 applications made through UCAS Apply were from outside the EU, and almost 45,000 were from an EU country other than the UK.

During the last decade, the number of international and EU undergraduate students coming to the UK for HE has increased substantially, and numbers applying through UCAS has risen by 57%. With this rise in undergraduate student numbers has come a growth in the diversity and competitiveness of the international recruitment environment, coupled with increasing regulation of this market by Government and its agencies.

Aligned to the growth in numbers of international and EU applicants, questions have been raised about the functionality offered by UCAS' undergraduate admissions products and services for international applications to UK HE. In particular, this review recognises the current practice of those HEPs that are choosing not to recruit international full fee-paying applicants through UCAS because of this issue.

The aims of the IAR are, therefore, to support the longer term growth and protection of the UK international and EU undergraduate recruitment market by providing:

- a clear appetite for an international applicant user-friendly UCAS Apply system, which allows for competitive international recruitment all year round, and supports the channels through which international students are recruited, such as schools, agents and international pathway providers
- efficiencies in the international admissions process, where compliance requirements have been amplified driven by increased regulation from Government agencies, particularly relating to immigration regulations
- services which assist with the significant challenge in capturing, verifying and understanding a plethora of international qualifications

Following a period of analysis, research and engagement with the sector, UCAS launched the International Admissions Review consultation in April 2014. This consultation sought views on 15 recommendations based on the feedback to the review in its information gathering phase.

The consultation provided UCAS with the opportunity to understand better the appetite for change and the priorities for improvement with respect to its services to international stakeholders.

2. Consultation exercise

The IAR commenced in 2013 with a detailed information gathering stage. This culminated in feedback from approximately 90 HEPs, 3,000 international and EU applicants, eight agents and international advisers, and a number of other stakeholders, including international schools, UKCISA, the UKVI and international foundation providers.

The IAR Steering Group analysed the evidence and developed a series of recommendations and proposals based on the findings and issues identified for the sector to consult on. The IAR consultation document was launched on 14 April 2014 at the UCAS Admissions Conference and officially closed on 4 July 2014, giving stakeholders just over 12 weeks in which to respond. Electronic copies of the consultation document were sent to UK Vice-Chancellors, College Principals and other key stakeholders. The document and access to the online response form and supporting papers were all made available through the UCAS website.

- During this period, UCAS conducted seven regional consultation workshops to discuss the review recommendations. These included 170 representatives from international admissions and recruitment staff, representing 119 UK HEPs.
- In addition, UCAS conducted five web chats attended by a total of 42 participants. This included teachers and advisers from international schools and colleges, international educational agents and current international/EU applicants.

Written responses were received by email in addition to those submitted using the online response form. A considerable response rate was achieved across all stakeholder groups, yielding a total of 337 responses received from:

- 154 UK HEPs and representative bodies
- 143 international schools, colleges and independent advisers
- 21 international educational agents
- 11 UK Government, non-Government and HE sector bodies
- eight private providers

There was some overlap between participation in workshops and written respondents. The responses were analysed by recommendation and stakeholder type to identify key themes and issues.

Due to the diverse responses received from providers, unless otherwise stated, percentages quoted throughout this report are those responses submitted 'on behalf of' the provider organisation, rather than those submitted as individuals within a provider.

The full quantitative analysis is available to download from www.ucas.com/ucas-consultations

3. Feedback on consultation responses

This section identifies the main themes arising from feedback on the 15 consultation recommendations and highlights key issues by stakeholder group. The recommendations are outlined and main themes summarised below. Quotations from responses have been used to illustrate key themes where appropriate.

The conclusions from these findings and proposals for action can be found in Section 5: Recommended actions (page 18).

Recommendation	IAR recommendation	All IAR responses *		
		Strongly agree & agree	Strongly disagree & disagree	Respondent base
1	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to revise current UCAS deadlines for international fee-paying applicants?	61%	26%	225
2	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to allow higher education providers to make instant offers to international fee-paying applicants at any point in the cycle?	76%	14%	193
3	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to improve the information and advice available through UCAS for international and EU applicants?	96%	3%	190
4	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to facilitate application fee payments from international and EU students?	81%	15%	178
5	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to reconsider how the reference request is managed for international and EU students?	70%	23%	176
6	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to enable applicants to clearly link themselves to agents?	73%	14%	174
7	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to enable applicants to upload digital documents in UCAS Apply?	94%	4%	177
8	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to improve data collection for the purpose of fee status assessment?	86%	6%	170
9	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to improve data collection for the purpose of visa status?	85%	7%	165
10	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to improve data collection of qualification information in UCAS Apply and provide more information about international and EU qualifications?	92%	3%	175
11	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to extend UCAS' role in verifying qualifications?	79%	13%	164
12	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation for UCAS to have a greater presence in overseas markets?	81%	12%	159
13	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to develop an enhanced international registered centre offer?	84%	6%	151
14	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to on-board embedded international pathway providers allied to higher education providers?	58%	17%	144
15	To what extent do you agree in principle with the recommendation to establish formal relationships with key strategic partners?	81%	8%	149

*includes HEPs, international schools and international agents' responses made via the online response form

Simplify the UCAS Apply process

Recommendation 1: Revise current UCAS deadlines for international fee-paying applicants.

Allow applications to be submitted before 1 September for the upcoming cycle; remove or extend the reject by default (RBD) and decline by default (DBD) deadlines. HEPs would be able to recruit more easily from countries whose academic year follows a different cycle (e.g. January to December) and it would allow more time for extra checks, which are often needed with international applicants.

Summary of findings

61% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, compared with 26% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 67% of HEPs responding to the question agreed or strongly agreed with the principle, with schools at 41% and agents at 50% respectively.

Feedback to the recommendation can be broadly categorised as general feedback on the proposal to revise deadlines overall, and feedback specifically on existing UCAS Apply deadlines.

General feedback on the recommendation to revise deadlines overall

'Deadlines should be revised for ALL applicants, not just international fee-paying applicants to ensure equality of opportunity. Different deadlines (by student type) would create even more confusion for applicants and admissions staff, especially where an applicant is in the process of being fee assessed and it might not be obvious which deadlines apply.' (HEP respondent)

As noted by the response above, support for this recommendation was often allied to the belief that any revisions to deadlines should apply to all applicants, regardless of fee status. In particular, reference was made to Chapter B2 of the QAA's UK Quality Code for HE, Recruitment, Selection and Admission (October 2013), which outlines the expectation that fair admissions is applied to all applicants: home, international and EU.

Indeed, one sector organisation detailed 'concerns over proposals which consider only one group of applicants in isolation', explaining that there was a risk that UCAS could be perceived by the sector as building a system which favours international applicants². Many called for a wider review given the lifting of the student number control in England in 2015:

'We do have some concerns over fairness with regard to non-international applicants; we sense that changing deadlines may be seen as international applicants having greater access to

places than home students do. With the removal of the cap on home student numbers next year this may be an opportunity to look at deadlines for all types of applicants.' (HEP respondent)

Crucially, the practicalities of a differentiated process for international applicants was raised by many respondents who highlighted that at the point of submitting an application, it has not been determined whether a student is an 'international' fee payer – and the fee status accorded can both change during the process, and be different depending on the assessing HEP. This ambiguity is difficult to reconcile with a differentiated service based on fee status.

HEP respondents also pointed out that UCAS should review variable course start dates rather than focusing only on the existing UCAS Apply deadlines, which are aligned to an autumn start point. It was clear that the general issue of how to deal with variable course start dates, which affects all types of applicant in the UCAS scheme, needed resolution and any international student system review should be considered within this greater debate.

It was also observed that better communications and more transparent terminology would go some way to improving the current system.

It was clear from applicants and HEP feedback that current deadlines were confusing or limiting for international applicants:

'I'm glad that I applied, although I decided not go to the United Kingdom for university. The major conflict was that the deadlines set by UK universities/UCAS interfered with the deadlines of other universities outside England. I had to turn down an offer because I was still waiting to hear back from other schools and didn't want to make a definite decision at that time³.' (End of Cycle 2013 Applicant Survey, Unplaced applicant)

Specific feedback on UCAS Apply deadlines

In terms of specific feedback on current deadlines, there were polarised views about the cycle starting earlier. Whilst some felt this would be a positive change and enhance recruitment, concerns were raised regarding the ability of admissions staff to manage early applications effectively given their focus on processing and welcoming the current intake.

Respondents pointed out that 15 January is not really a deadline, as most HEPs still accept applications from international applicants after this date as long as there is still capacity on the course. Thus, using the word 'deadline' at this point might unnecessarily deter applications to UK HEPs, as it could lead students to believe that applying was no longer possible:

'As I was making a late application I was told by my careers lecturer that I couldn't apply at all because the late deadline was "January", I found out very quickly by myself that I still had more

2. Sector organisation response

3. Quote from International Applicants End of Cycle Survey 2013 which formed part of the information gathering stage of the International Admissions Review

than six weeks to apply⁴.’ (End of Cycle 2013 Applicant Survey, Applicant placed in Clearing)

Feedback from schools offering the International Baccalaureate (IB) pointed out that predicting grades to meet the 15 January deadline was difficult so early into the course, as no assessments had taken place at this point.

It is also clear that international students were not all synchronised with the UK admissions cycle:

‘I think that the equal consideration (15 January) deadline should be extended as well. Most students in India wait until Dec/Jan or even later to decide on where they wish to apply. Having the deadline further down will encourage them to apply to study in UK.’ (Current student at a UK HEP)

A number of respondents felt that the Decline by default (DBD) and Reject by default (RBD) dates could be removed for international applicants, although there was acknowledgment by some HEPs that the DBD had benefits in terms of their planning activities, and often acted as a prompt for applicants to establish contact and confirm that they did, in fact, wish to take up a place. There was an appetite for greater provider control of both DBD and RBD dates, with a clear perceived benefit to HEPs being able to place a ‘hold’ where needed, or to be able to reverse this where it was not an intended outcome. However, there was a concern that extending the RBD for one provider could unnecessarily delay an application from proceeding.

There was clear support for an extension to the main cycle closure to prevent ‘direct to Clearing’ applicants from entering Clearing, a process which was cited as causing significant confusion for international students.

It was suggested by HEPs that UCAS Apply should ‘allow new applications to be submitted after 30 June into a “normal” process as opposed to being inappropriately treated as Clearing applications⁵.’

Recommendation 2: The ability to make instant offers through UCAS to international fee-paying applicants at any point in the cycle.

Aligned to the revision of UCAS Apply deadlines, allowing HEPs to make instant conditional offers without recourse to the RPA process.

Summary of findings

76% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 14% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 79% of HEPs and 80% of schools agreed or strongly agreed, with most supporting free text comments from HEPs citing speed of offer and enhanced competitiveness as the major benefits to such a proposal. The inability to make a conditional offer using a record of prior acceptance (RPA)⁶, together with a general dislike of the RPA process, was also a factor in support of this recommendation.

It was clear from the free text responses and web chats held with schools, that ‘instant offers’ were mistakenly believed to be ‘quick decisions’ from HEPs. Qualitative feedback indicated that ‘instant offers’ were a practice schools would not be in support of.

HEPs felt that bringing the ability to make instant offers within the UCAS application process would be beneficial in terms of consistency of existing in-market practices, better meeting the needs of HEPs using agents and creating a ‘level playing field’ across all providers.

‘From a recruitment perspective we would welcome the concept of making instant offers to international fee-paying applicants. This supports in-country recruitment activity, mirrors the activity already undertaken by some HEPs accepting international applicants outside UCAS and will enhance our competitiveness in the international market place.’ (HEP respondent)

Most concerns around this proposal seemed to centre on how exactly this process would work, with an emphasis on the recommendation not preventing an applicant from making further choices.

‘We would not wish instant offers to be equated to instant and final decision making for international applicants.’ (HEP respondent)

There was a definite sense that this recommendation wouldn’t be effective unless it dovetailed with HEPs’ systems and considered their Tier 4 compliance obligations to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI).

Once again, it was felt that this should not be a practice reserved for international students only, and it should be available to all applicants.

4. Quote from International Applicants End of Cycle Survey 2013 which formed part of the information gathering stage of the International Admissions Review

5. HEP respondent

6. RPA form can be used to accept unconditionally an applicant who’s met a UCAS provider’s entry requirements and doesn’t want to apply elsewhere (and cannot be considered by any other UCAS provider)

Improving the UCAS Apply experience for international and EU applicants:

Recommendation 3: Improve the information & advice available through UCAS for international and EU applicants.

The means by which they can access this – including more flexible ways of contacting UCAS with queries, more videos, tutorials and help text for overseas applicants within UCAS Apply.

Summary of findings

96% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 3% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Terminology was cited as one of the key issues, with Adjustment, Extra and Clearing each having over 100 respondents describing these as problematic.

‘Terminology and jargon is already confusing for UK applicants, and international applicants do not always understand a centralised applications system for the UK (they generally tend to be more aware of the system in their own country). Therefore, it would be beneficial to make the application process as simple as possible by ensuring that the information and advice is clear and easy to understand.’ (HEP respondent)

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the suggestions to improve ucas.com navigation, with 99% of respondents agreeing with suggestions made in the recommendation. These included a clear starting point on the home page, ensuring that key content is not listed below the page fold, clearer information on the UCAS Apply timeline and an improvement to information on both scholarships and entry requirements.

Specific feedback was centred on the provision of information in different languages⁷ as well as ‘country specific’ pages. The possibility of ‘personalising’ the web service to provide advice and guidance to meet a particular student’s needs and a ‘live chat’ facility were also mooted:

‘About the live chat, I think it would be nice that both possibilities were provided - it is great to have an individual conversation when you want to ask something very specific, but a broader chat allows you to take advantage of questions of others.’ (web chat applicant respondent)

During the consultation workshops, a clear need for UCAS to engage more effectively with HEP international offices emerged. Many respondents felt the recommendation did not go far enough, as it was fed back that better information and advice was needed, not just for applicants, but also for the international offices that serve them.

7. Translated UCAS guides are available at: www.ucas.com/internationalguides

Recommendation 4: Facilitate payments from international and EU applicants.

Adding to the types of payment methods offered for the UCAS application fee, and considering how UCAS could extend its payment service to allow for tuition fee payments to HEPs.

Summary of findings

81% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 15% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

‘Making it easier for non-UK applicants to pay for their UCAS application is very sensible and will almost certainly improve the applicant experience.’ (HEP respondent)

Applicants also suggested that other payment methods should be considered.

‘I paid via a bank transfer from my parents’ bank account, since the online payment service blocked my mother’s debit card. It was very difficult for me to get the payment cleared in time. This part of the UCAS application system is not very user-friendly. I would suggest that UCAS attempts to make payment easier (for example: you might consider adding services such as PayPal, through which applicants who have a PayPal account, can make payment).’ (unplaced applicant)

Free text responses indicate that any concerns do not lie in UCAS improving its own application fee payment service, but rather in it extending its remit to include the collection of tuition fee deposits on behalf of HEPs. This was borne out by the 65% of HEPs who disagreed or strongly disagreed with a system which could collect tuition fees from international students. The major concerns raised by this proposal centred on the potential cost and operation of such a system.

‘There are any number of unintended consequences when financial services are brought into play. Refunds, third party processing and deposit payments are all areas of concern.’ (HEP respondent)

References were made to the UKVI with concerns that perhaps, counter intuitively, a UCAS tuition fee payment system might actually make the process for applicants more problematic by adding in a potential delay.

‘HEPs wish to engage with the students to collect fees/deposits. Given that we need to supply information to the UKVI regarding fees/deposits and scholarships it would be prudent that the funds are processed and held by the HEP. The HEP may find that they have additional IT costs to enable this process to be undertaken. Could delay Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies (CAS) production if fee payments are going through a 3rd party.’ (HEP respondent)

Concern was also raised that this may also then create a two-tier payment system for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Recommendation 5: Reconsider how the reference request is managed for international and EU students.

Looking at how meaningful references are and what could be done to address applicants' and HEPs' concerns and issues.

Summary of findings

70% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 23% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. However, whereas HEPs had 18% who disagreed or strongly disagreed, 33% of schools disagreed or strongly disagreed.

It was clear from web chat feedback that schools would place a higher value on the expansion of the character limit imposed on references, and they felt that both UCAS and HEPs could do more to support them in terms of the desired content of references. Allied to Recommendation 7, schools felt that the ability to upload academic transcripts with an application would ease the discomfort they felt with predicted grades.

'The reference is an important part of our decision making process for all applicants.' (HEP respondent)

There was a clear message that references were valued by HEPs and they preferred other HEPs not to be able to 'opt out' of this as part of the application process. There were also specific concerns raised about how removing the need for a reference may be perceived by both applicants and external bodies, such as the UKVI, particularly in an increasingly regulated sector.

That said, there was strong support for the ability to upload a reference in a native language, together with a notarised translation, despite the fact that this might also lead to a need for increased vigilance on the possibility of fraud.

'We support the proposal that applicants could upload their reference (along with an English translation where necessary). This process is common at postgraduate level.' (HEP respondent)

Additionally, the feedback from schools was echoed by HEPs in their suggestion that there was a need for UCAS to provide better information and advice to applicants and referees in this area and to consider a more structured approach to increase the usefulness of the reference as evidence used in the admissions process:

'We also feel international referees need better advice about the reference (perhaps including an actual structure with sub-headings or a template). We're obviously interested in academic performance, prediction of any outstanding results, GPA/class ranking, contextual information on the student, contextual information about the education structure, etc. Applicants themselves also sometimes require more guidance about who to ask to be the referee.' (HEP respondent)

Many providers did not feel comfortable with the substitution of a reference letter with a sponsor letter.

8. School respondent

Improving the services for HEPs recruiting overseas:

Recommendation 6: Enable applicants to link themselves clearly to agents and schools and to link their applications to sponsoring bodies in UCAS Apply.

Improving agent trust in the UCAS Apply process and delivering efficiencies in commission payments and, for sponsored students, in supporting the CAS issue and subsequent visa application.

Summary of findings

73% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 14% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. However, whereas HEPs had 88% who agreed or strongly agreed and 6% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, 40% of schools disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Some schools' anxieties centred on the fact that agents were not impartial, with some stating that in certain markets they felt a large number of 'unethical'⁸ agencies were in operation. Workshop respondents also felt that UCAS should consider a section which enabled applicants to list any adviser, whether that was a school, agent or even a family member.

However most HEPs were clear that agents were playing an increasingly important role in the recruitment of international students, and many were high quality and provided an excellent service.

'This would be a welcome change and would increase the efficiency and transparency of the agent process. Adding a question to the Apply stage of "Are you using the services of an education agent?" would help institutions to keep in line with data protection and be useful at the commission claim stage. It would also be easier to determine which stage of the application an agent has helped with, particularly if the application has been made by the school. However, the primary contact details and email address should be that of the student, not the agent.' (HEP respondent)

Many HEPs welcomed the proposal for applicants to clearly link themselves to agents in their application. They felt that this would not only improve their data collection and market intelligence in respect of the use of agents, but that it would also provide a more efficient and transparent approach for agents who would then be able to focus their attention on assisting applicants through the application process. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that this could be of enormous benefit in assisting with the administration related to commission payments.

HEPs also commented that it was important for the application to be designed to have applicants' direct contact information, particularly with reference to UKVI guidance on CAS issuance, as well as contact details for their agent or adviser. It was clear from feedback that consideration needed to be given as to how this linkage would work so as to avoid endorsement of using agents as preferred recruitment practice, and to account for the possibility that a student may wish to change agent midway through the process and be linked to both a school and an agency⁹. Respondents were clear that a 'date stamp' would be useful in this regard.

Support for this proposal was also contingent on it being made clear that the use of an agent neither advantages nor disadvantages an applicant. Furthermore, it does not imply any sort of relationship with a HEP that does not have a contractual relationship with an agent listed on an application.

Recommendation 7: Enable the upload of digital documents in UCAS Apply.

Saving HEPs time spent on document collection, and aiding compliance with their Tier 4 sponsor licence issued by the UKVI.

Summary of findings

94% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 4% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. HEPs and agents were both in strong support of the recommendation, with 96% and 100% respectively agreeing or strongly agreeing. This was also supported by schools, with 87% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Furthermore, school web chat responses indicated that this would be a welcome addition to UCAS Apply.

It was clear from feedback to the review that there was a consensus amongst HEPs, agencies and many schools that this capability would drive efficiencies, both for the HE sector and all of the applicants it serves, but that it would be particularly useful for international applicants in relation to documentation allied to Tier 4 visa sponsorship – particularly if UCAS could put systems in place for authenticity¹⁰. That said, it was also clear that functionality, such as how the UCAS Apply system would interact with software houses, will be key to the successful introduction of any digital document collection system.

'A great deal of time and energy is spent requesting additional documentation. Again, there would need to be a workable solution for all software houses and it would be beneficial to request both original language and translations and generally all documents that are required by UKVI.' (HEP respondent)

Another consideration raised in relation to the development of such a system was that measures would need to be in place to

prevent the upload of 'unnecessary' documentation by applicants and to restrict the size of uploads to avoid onerous downloads for HEPs. Similarly, there was a call for 'a mechanism which allows us to choose the documents we wish to transfer to our systems'¹¹, which recognised that HEPs may not wish to download all documents a student chose to upload. Conversely, it was also highlighted that with portfolios, there would be a need to consider allowing more than one upload, given that applicants may be applying to HEPs or courses with differing portfolio requirements. All agreed that the ability to upload documents would be needed at the time of, and beyond, the initial application submission.

Applicants were also supportive of a digital document collection capability with several web chat respondents claiming that 'it would be easier to upload it on UCAS' in relation to transcripts, academic and language scores, along with passport details.

Recommendation 8: Improve data collection in UCAS Apply for the purposes of fee status assessment.

Ensuring students enter the required data from the outset of the admissions process, removing the need for additional checking, and driving efficiencies through a standardised capture of data and ability to upload routine items of evidence.

Summary of findings

86% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 6% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. HEPs and agents were both in strong support of the recommendation, with 94% and 100% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Schools were also supportive at 71%, but had concerns about the potential impact of the proposal on applicants. In particular, schools were clear that they felt the current fee status assessment process was generally problematic in that the decisions made by HEPs were varied, although some HEPs were robust in their desire to protect this autonomy.

'HEPs will always make their own individual decisions regarding fee assessments, however a considerable amount of time is currently spent in admissions offices obtaining core information-related fee assessment. Even if a proportion of this information could be requested from the applicant at the point of application it is likely to lead to some efficiencies both for the HEP and for the applicant themselves.' (HEP respondent)

Whilst there was a strong belief that this recommendation would drive sector efficiencies, as well as aiding the consistency and accuracy of fee status decisions, it was also clear that many HEPs assess fee status differently, not least in Scotland where there was the issue about the rest of UK (RUK) fee status and EU/Scottish status.

9. For example, it may be that an applicant uses school assistance for the application, but subsequently seeks an agency to assist with visa formalities.

10. HEP respondent

11. HEP respondent

'UCAS should be mindful that HEP processes and requirements in this regard may vary and that there is no one set of 'standard' evidence in relation to fee query cases. It may be possible to agree a sector-wide fees status assessment form and enable the upload of relevant proof such as temporary employment contracts, lists of return visits to the UK, proof of UK property etc. but it does need to be clear that this is a facilitation activity only and that the individual decision rests with each HEP' (HEP respondent)

It is therefore key that the sector works together to agree the capture of applicant information.

Recommendation 9: Improve data collection in UCAS Apply for the purpose of visa status.

Include fields to clarify progression of study if the individual has previously held a UK student visa and aid Tier 4 sponsor licence compliance.

Summary of findings

85% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle. HEPs and agents were both in strong support of the recommendation, with 92% and 83% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Schools were supportive at 73%.

'A considerable amount of time is spent sending questionnaires to international students regarding previous study in the UK, if this could somehow be collected centrally as a core part of the application process this would be beneficial. It might also lead to increased levels of disclosure from applicants – at the moment we do have a small number of applicants who may have been in the UK previously, but this has not been clear from the UCAS application.' (HEP respondent)

It was clear that HEPs and schools were concerned that the collection of visa information should not be a barrier to an application progressing. HEPs felt it would be useful to have the information early. HEPs specifically mentioned it would be useful to be able to identify the applicants who needed the academic progression flag ticking on their CAS.

Another issue raised by both HEPs and schools was that UCAS would need to have robust procedures in place to ensure it could respond speedily and effectively to changes in regulation.

Recommendation 10: Improve the collection of qualification information in UCAS Apply and provide more information about international and EU qualifications.

Enhancing the qualification lists in UCAS Apply would make it easier for students to identify their qualifications and enter the correct details, removing the need for HEPs to request these separately. UCAS to provide more information about international qualifications.

Summary of findings

92% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 3% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. HEPs had 97% who agreed or strongly agreed and 86% of schools agreed or strongly agreed. Only 3% of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposal.

'We would strongly agree with this recommendation and believe this, plus the implementation of a system of digital document capture, could bring about real efficiencies when processing international and EU applications'. (HEP respondent)

The key concern raised was that the current UCAS Apply qualification capture does not act in a dynamic way based on the country where the applicant, school or agency is based. In particular, it was mooted that where a school or agency is a UCAS registered centre, these could be asked what qualifications they offer, or mainly deal with, which could then be used to populate a 'popular' qualifications list. Schools made some keen observations in this regard. In actual fact UCAS registered centres can upload the qualifications the school offer using the UCAS Adviser Apply. Clearer communication to registered centres in this regard would improve efficiency.

'My students make it very clear that ease of application is a big factor in pursuing an application or dropping it. Use a drop-down menu with all the international qualifications and then let students select courses. Allow option for student to enter courses not mentioned which could then be entered for drop-down menu for next year. This way the students do much of the work for UCAS.' (School respondent)

Perhaps more importantly, where an applicant is not applying via a UCAS centre, it was suggested that UCAS could still ask for the country in which the applicant's school is based. UCAS Apply could then use a more generic 'popular' list for that country.

It was clear that, given that this was the main currency of admissions transactions, much could be improved in their collection.

'I think for me the most difficult parts were the ones related to my qualifications because, I got confused with equivalents between different countries and I didn't know what I was expected to put down or how.' (web chat applicant)

It was also clear that the HEP sector could usefully be consulted in the redesign of qualification capture.

'The system needs to be more intuitive with regard to non-UK qualifications. For example the applicant should be able to indicate in which country they studied their school leaving qualifications, from this there should then be a drop-down menu which relates specifically to the qualifications offered in that country. Pop-ups which ask students questions such as "Have you listed all the exams you sat?" or "Have you listed all the results you obtained?" or "Have you uploaded all transcripts of grades?" (HEP respondent)

57% of HEPs confirmed they currently use Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs), with the majority wanting a far broader range of qualifications offered. The majority of HEPs cited advantages and disadvantages in their responses to the question of whether they would want international and EU qualifications to be allocated Tariff points. This was reflected in a fairly equal divide, with 50% of HEPs wanting the allocation of Tariff points compared with 41% who did not.

Support for the proposal centred on additional guidance on the equivalency of grades, and transparency and entry requirements resource for international applicants. However, there were concerns surrounding the capacity of UCAS to achieve such a comprehensive framework, and extending perceived inconsistencies with existing benchmarking.

Recommendation 11: Extend UCAS' role in verifying qualifications to support international and EU recruitment.

Expand UCAS' Awarding Body Linkage (ABL) function to include more international qualifications and consider other extensive methods of verification where ABL was not possible.

Summary of findings

79% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 13% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. HEPs had 84% who agreed or strongly agreed and 69% of schools agreed or strongly agreed. All agents agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal. However, there were some significant concerns raised in relation to the practicalities associated with the recommendation.

'In practice UCAS would not be able to do this for the volume of international applications. The importance of this area linking back to our sponsor licence would mean that individual institutions would still conduct their own verification meaning that this would be duplicated effort.' (HEP respondent)

Thus, in principle, whilst many HEPs supported this proposal, it was clear that they were not convinced that the amount of work

which UCAS might need to put into this would be cost-effective. Added to this, it was suggested by HEPs that despite such a service, the responsibility on Tier 4 sponsors to undertake fraud and verification checks would remain and thus this proposal would not deliver a tangible benefit.

However, it was felt that the UCAS ABL coverage of SELTS would be achievable and would be strongly supported.

Increase UCAS' international presence:

Recommendation 12: Attend overseas events to support HEPs.

Continue to support HEPs overseas and expand this in line with HEP priorities.

Summary of findings

81% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 12% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. HEPs had 78% who agreed or strongly agreed versus 93% of schools and 100% of agents who agreed or strongly agreed. 15% of HEPs disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposal versus only 3% of schools. However, both HEPs and schools were clear that UCAS should be focused on international advisers.

'The suggestion that UCAS increases its presence at overseas events is welcome, although the university would also welcome proposals for UCAS to improve its offer for training teachers and advisers (both in person and online) to enable teachers and advisers themselves to give applicants better support.' (HEP respondent)

Schools were clear that the lack of a named contact at UCAS with whom to liaise was of concern and that online delivery of information would be desirable¹². Applicants also noted a desire for 'online resources', which aligned with the desire they expressed for 'live chat' and 'webinars' in Recommendation 3.

Recommendation 13: Develop an enhanced international UCAS registered centre offer which supports HEPs' overseas recruitment from schools and agents.

To identify an agent in UCAS Apply will increase agent acceptance and trust of UCAS, making them more willing to put their students through the system. Offer better access to training and bespoke international marketing collateral, and allow for improved communication with agents and international schools.

12. During the web chats UCAS hosted for schools and agents, it was clear that there was no awareness that a dedicated team already existed within the UCAS Contact Centre.

Summary of findings

84% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 12% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. HEPs had 87% who agreed or strongly agreed versus 69% of schools and 100% of agents who agreed or strongly agreed. 4% of HEPs disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposal versus 10% of schools. However, once again, both HEPs and schools were clear that UCAS should be focused on international advisers.

'In recent years it does not appear that UCAS had an appropriate level of resource dedicated to supporting international schools to become a UCAS centre.' (HEP respondent)

Where schools and HEPs fundamentally seemed to differ was in relation to this proposal and the support that it would bring to agents. Schools were reluctant to be in the same category as agents, but HEPs were clear that the support UCAS offered to agents was of high importance to them.

From feedback to the review, it was clear that many HEPs were not familiar with the concept of a UCAS registered centre which would support the findings of Recommendation 3, where it was suggested that better support for international offices within HEPs was required.

Recommendation 14: On-board embedded international pathway providers allied to HEPs.

Allow for appropriate international pathway courses to be included in the UCAS search tool and UCAS Apply system.

Summary of findings

58% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 17% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. HEPs had 56% who agreed or strongly agreed versus 68% of schools and 66% of agents who agreed or strongly agreed. 18% of HEPs disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposal and 14% of schools also disagreed or strongly disagreed. 25% of respondents answered 'not applicable' as they did not have any such pathway provision. Of the four pathway providers who responded to this recommendation in the review, three were in agreement commenting that:

'As an embedded international pathway we see significant benefits in having a system that promotes best practice in the admissions system. It will facilitate a positive UK education experience and allow more data to be generated to review performance of international students from different backgrounds.' (Pathway provider)

Therefore, it was clear that there was some support for students to apply to pathway programmes using UCAS Apply, and

consultation workshop responses clearly articulated that being able to forward UCAS applicants inappropriate for direct entry to a HEP to any allied pathway provider would be particularly beneficial.

'We think this would bring with it benefits, particularly with regard to referring those applicants who do not meet our entry criteria onto our pathway provider, without falling foul of data protection regulations.' (HEP respondent)

HEPs clearly reflected that UCAS Apply, in presenting five choices to applicants, was not well suited to the progression of a student from a pathway course to an undergraduate degree. Added to this, pathway programmes were usually specific to the provider at which they were being studied, or with whom they had a relationship.

This reflected comments made during the information gathering phase of the IAR, where it was suggested that UCAS should create 'a separate more straightforward UCAS process for those students who are progressing onto one, (pre-decided by foundation programme) university'¹³, and where it was mooted that a 'portal similar to the suggested agent portal would be useful for foundation providers so that they can monitor their applications'¹⁴.

Recommendation 15: Establish formal relationships with key strategic partners such as the British Council, UKVI and SELT providers.

Summary of findings

81% of all respondents to the online survey agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation in principle, with 8% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. HEPs had 87% who agreed or strongly agreed versus 77% of schools and 100% of agents who agreed or strongly agreed. 10% of HEPs and schools disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposal.

Whilst most respondents could see the value in having a relationship with key sector bodies, they felt these should be 'additional to' rather than 'instead of' their own, or other appropriate sector body, relationships.

'We wish to support this proposal in principle but would want to work with UCAS to develop more fully exactly how these relationships might operate. We do however foresee benefits for the sector in these relationships being established provided they do not come at the cost of such relationships being formed with HEPs directly.' (HEP respondent)

Feedback made clear that UCAS should move forward with this proposal, but it did not have a lobbying role to play.

13. HEP respondent

14. HEP respondent

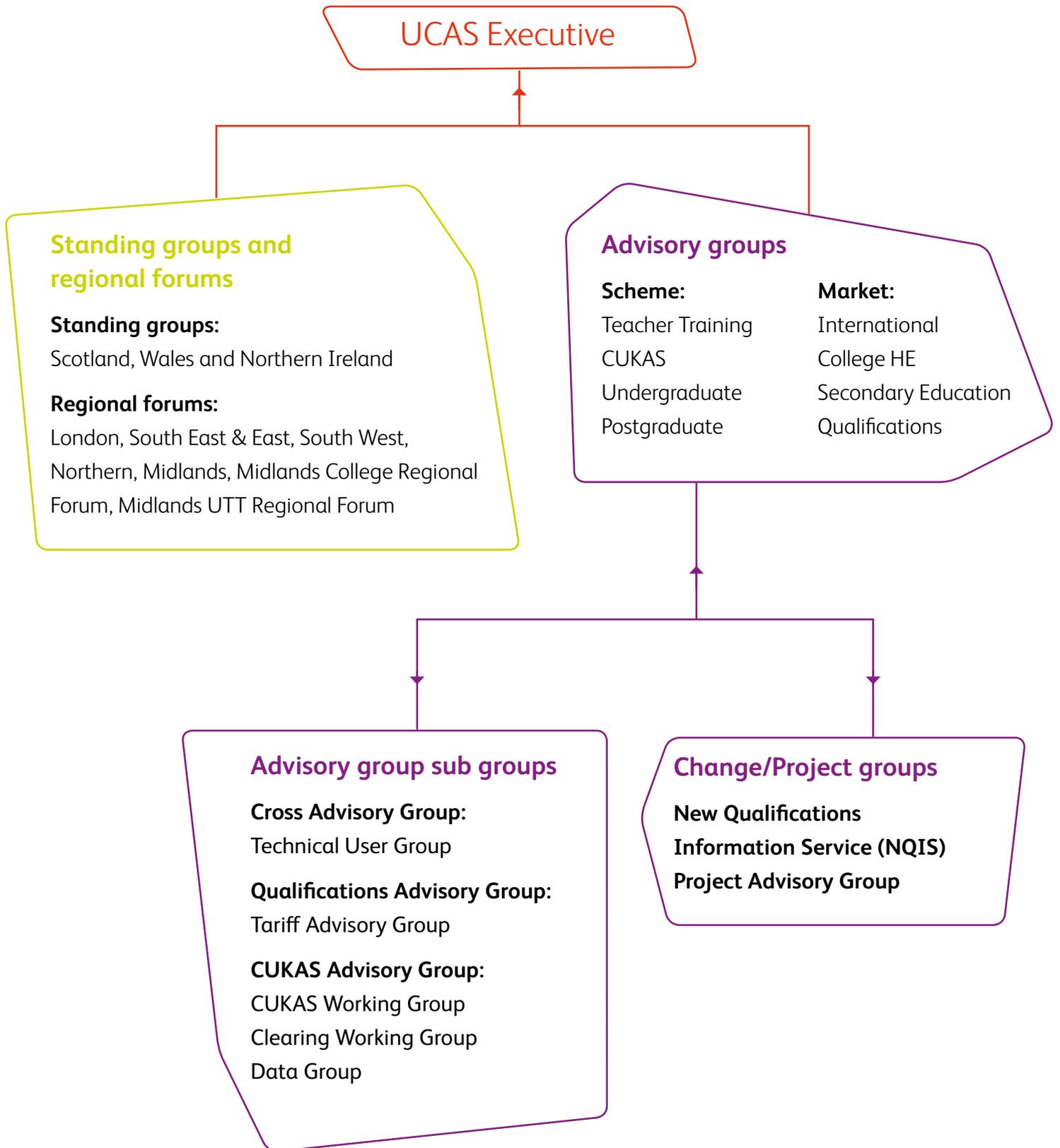
4. Putting our findings into context

The findings of the UCAS IAR should be considered in the context of the wider policy landscape:

- The significant changes to the fee levels charged to home and EU applicants throughout the UK and the way that student number controls were managed in England. Although we saw a slight decline in demand for higher education in 2012, we have continued to see a general increase in demand for higher education since 2006. These changes coincided with the Government's ambition to create a more competitive market in higher education.
- The way that student numbers are managed throughout the UK is becoming increasingly diverse. For example, in Scotland and Northern Ireland the management of student numbers is based on the domicile of the individual learner. Therefore these providers have three categories and targets of learners to recruit based on domicile: Scotland, Northern Ireland, UK, EU and international.
- The large role of private providers and the diversity of provision.
- The increased political focus on net migration figures, of which students are included.
- A declining pool of 18 year UK domiciled learners which is unlikely to recover before 2020.
- The Autumn Statement in 2013 announced that, from 2015, the student number control policy in England (the High Grades policy) would end. Although the full details of this policy and the delivery of it are yet to be fully understood, commentators have suggested that the competition between international and home applicants may increase as a result of this. However, it should be noted that 2013 saw the highest number of acceptances of UK domiciled students to date and 2014 looks as if it will exceed this. Equally, admissions practitioners tend to separate the recruitment of home and international students and operate to individual targets.



The new structure of UCAS groups and forums



5. Recommended actions

The section below sets out the recommendations that were agreed by the UCAS Board in September 2014, together with the further action required. A summary table can be found on pages 2 & 3.

Recommendation 1: Revise current UCAS Apply deadlines for international fee-paying applicants.

This recommendation was supported by 67% of HEPs, but with a large number of comments relating to the need for there to be a much wider review of deadlines than simply in relation to 'international' applicants. Furthermore, it was felt that a multiple start date model would need to be considered in any future build of UCAS Apply, a proposition which would, if adopted, significantly impact discussions around deadlines. Further consideration is therefore required.

UCAS will:

- work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a UCAS Apply Business Rules Working Group. The review has shown a desire for further consideration of:
 - deadlines for all applicants (home, EU and international)
 - a multiple start date model
 - HEP control of DBD and RBD dates
- seek further feedback on 24 March art & design deadline from admissions colleagues dealing with these applications
- work through its Clearing Working Group to consider 'developing a process for all applicants (either existing or new, home or international) who have not secured a place through a UCAS main-scheme application' (Clearing Working Group Terms of Reference)

Timescales for development will be dependent on the wider UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services.

Recommendation 2: The ability to make instant offers through UCAS Apply to international fee-paying applicants at any point in the cycle.

This recommendation was widely supported by the HEP sector with 79% believing this to be something that would enhance competitiveness in the overseas market. However, it was again something the respondents felt should not only be available to international applicants, and therefore, again, this calls for a wider review.

UCAS will:

- work through a UCAS Apply Capability Working Group to consider the implications of introducing an 'instant offer' functionality for all applicants (home, EU and International)

Timescales for development will be dependent on the wider UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services.

Recommendation 3: Improve the information and advice available through UCAS for EU and international applicants.

This recommendation was widely supported by all stakeholders.

UCAS will:

- work through the Relationship Management Team to engage with colleagues in HEP international offices
- work through the Marketing and Communications Team to champion the international applicant information and advice needs
- through its Head of Learner Experience investigate extending the ways in which applicants can contact UCAS

UCAS will start working on the development of an International Office Engagement Strategy immediately.

Recommendation 4: Facilitate payments from international and EU applicants.

The recommendation to facilitate applicant payments to UCAS was widely supported by all stakeholders, although the support stopped short of UCAS providing any tuition fee payment option.

UCAS will:

- through its Market Intelligence Team, work with international schools, applicants and agents to understand what additional methods of payment would be desirable

Timescales for development will be dependent on the wider UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services.

Recommendation 5: Reconsider how the reference request is managed for international and EU students.

There was strong support to retain the reference as part of UCAS Apply but to improve the collection of these by allowing for digital uploads. There was a clear driver for UCAS to create a more structured template for all referees, not just those supporting international applicants.

UCAS will:

- work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a UCAS Apply Functionality Working Group to consider revision of the current reference section for all applicants (home, EU and international)
- work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a Digital Document Collection (DDC) Steering Group

Timescales for development will be dependent on the wider UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services.

Recommendation 6: Enable applicants to link themselves clearly to agents and to link their applications to sponsoring bodies.

There was support for enabling all applicants (home, EU and international) to list those supporting them in their application. Support centered on increased transparency between HEPs and agents, data collection for both commission payments and market intelligence purposes.

UCAS will:

- work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a UCAS Apply Capability Working Group. It will consider revision of the current UCAS Apply template for all applicants (home, EU and international) and their advisers and review the functionality of such a section, in relation to agents and sponsoring bodies in particular

Timescales for development will be dependent on the wider UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services.

Recommendations 7, 8 and 9: Enable the upload of digital documents. Improve data collection for the purposes of fee status assessment and for the assessment of visa status.

There was strong support to build capability for digital uploads, but a steering group was required to ensure functionality will meet the sector's needs. Additionally, there was support to improve data collection for the purposes of fee and visa statuses, to drive sector efficiencies and aid decision making and Tier 4 visa sponsorship compliance.

UCAS will:

- work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a Digital Document Collection (DDC) Steering Group

Timescales for development will be dependent on the wider UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services.

Recommendation 10: Improve the collection of qualification information in UCAS Apply and provide more information about international and EU qualifications.

Strong support was given to improve the collection of qualification information by allowing for digital uploads. Also, creating a more responsive qualification database for all applicants was widely supported, as was an extension of qualification information.

UCAS will:

- work through the Qualifications Advisory Group to consider revision of the current qualification capture for all applicants (home, EU and international) and feed into the DDC Steering Group
- offer a broader range of international and EU qualifications as UCAS Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs)

* a school, college or organisation that can help students apply to higher education.

Recommendation 11: Extend UCAS' role in verifying qualifications.

Whilst desirable, concerns were outlined that the cost of implementation may be too great for return on investment. This was coupled with a concern that it would not be a priority item in relation to other proposals, such as a multiple start date model and digital document collection. However, it was felt that Awarding Body Linkage (ABL) coverage of SELTS would be achievable and would be strongly supported.

UCAS will:

- work through the UCAS International ABL Working Group to:
 - investigate the return on investment of verifying some international qualifications
 - progress with the inclusion of SELT results

Approaches have already been made to the key SELT providers, as a starting point to bringing in key international examinations into the ABL fold.

Recommendation 12: Attend overseas events to support HEPs.

Both HEPs and schools were clear that UCAS should be focused on providing information, advice and training to international advisers.

UCAS will:

- work through a newly created 'Head of Adviser Experience' role to develop an international advisers' engagement plan as part of UCAS' adviser strategy, with an emphasis on digitally delivered training

UCAS has appointed a Head of Adviser Experience and will develop an international advisers' engagement plan as part of UCAS' adviser strategy.

Recommendation 13: Develop an enhanced international UCAS registered centre* offer which supports overseas recruitment from schools and agents.

Once again, both HEPs and schools were clear that UCAS should be focused on international advisers.

UCAS will:

- work through a newly created 'Head of Adviser Experience' role to develop a strategic approach to the recruitment and maintenance of UCAS registered centres
- develop a plan to raise the visibility of UCAS' Schools Team as a nominated point of contact for registered centres
- work through the Relationship Management Team to promote registered centres to HEPs

UCAS has appointed a Head of Adviser Experience and will develop a strategic approach to the recruitment and maintenance of UCAS registered centres.

Recommendation 14: On-board embedded international pathway providers allied to HEPs.

There was no clear consensus from respondents to support students using UCAS Apply to progress from pathway programmes. However, there was recognition that being able to forward UCAS applications that are unsuitable for direct entry to a HEP on to an allied pathway provider, would be beneficial. UCAS will:

- work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a UCAS Apply Business Rules Working Group to consider the referral of applicants to their foundation providers where they are unsuitable for direct entry to year 1
- work through UCAS' groups and forums to ask for sector support to establish a UCAS Apply Capability Working Group to consider a separate process for students progressing from pathway providers

Timescales for development will be dependent on the wider UCAS transformational process and rebuild of its application services.

Recommendation 15: Establish formal relationships with key strategic partners.

This recommendation was widely supported by all stakeholders provided that UCAS' relationships were additional to the bodies already in place to serve the sector needs. In particular, it was felt that the HEP sector would not wish for UCAS to take a lobbying role.

UCAS will:

- work through the UCAS International Team and wider UCAS Policy Team to continue to build relationships with key strategic partners

UCAS will start working on the development of an international stakeholder engagement strategy immediately.





If you need any further information about this consultation please email: international@ucas.ac.uk

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