

The new UCAS Tariff – a factsheet for international admissions offices – updated September 2015

This factsheet is for staff at universities and colleges who are involved in moving to the new UCAS Tariff and have specific responsibility for international admissions. It provides some background to the UCAS Tariff and the changes. The information in this factsheet supplements our general factsheet for HEPs which is available here:

<https://www.ucas.com/members-providers/qualifications/new-ucas-tariff>

Factsheets for teachers and advisers, students and parents can also be found on the same page.

Background on the UCAS Tariff

The main purpose of the new Tariff is to provide a broad metric for qualifications at Level 3/SCQF Level 6¹ to support university and college management information needs. When the UCAS Tariff was first introduced in 2001, its purpose was to help universities and colleges understand the wide range of different qualifications students could study in terms of their size and depth of study. Whilst many universities and colleges use specific qualifications and grades to describe their entry requirements and offers, some continue to use UCAS Tariff points to express entry requirements and offers to learners. All universities and colleges use the UCAS Tariff for submitting data returns to HESA.

UCAS Tariff points are allocated to a range of qualifications generally studied when learners are aged 16 to 18. The qualifications are Level 3/SCQF Level 6 on the national qualifications framework managed by UK qualification regulators or, for international qualifications, at a similar level in their country of origin.

About the new UCAS Tariff

The new Tariff is based on a mathematical model which uses a qualification size and grading scale to generate a total number of points and is not comparable with the current approach.

The new UCAS Tariff uses a smaller range of points. For example, an A* grade at A level under the current Tariff is 140 points, and under the new Tariff an A* at A level will be 56 points. This does not mean the value of an A* grade at A level has changed, only that the new UCAS Tariff uses a different number scale.

International qualifications and the new Tariff

¹ In all instances references to Level 3 encapsulate Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Level 6 plus the Advanced Higher in Scotland.

At present only a small number of international qualifications attract UCAS Tariff points. This is because the new Tariff only lists qualifications that have been given points under the existing Tariff. The process for adding qualifications to the existing Tariff was not very well suited to international qualifications. However, the new Tariff has been designed to be more flexible, so it will be possible to add more international qualifications.

International qualifications on the existing Tariff are²:

- Advanced Placement
- Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education
- Irish Leaving Certificate

Information about how many new UCAS Tariff points each of these qualifications gets is available in [“UCAS Tariff tables: New Tariff points for entry to higher education from 2017”](#). Please note that the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) has yet to be allocated Tariff points under the new methodology; please see the section on HKDSE below.

The impact of the new Tariff on admissions

UK higher education providers are autonomous in setting their entry requirements. Not all providers use the Tariff to express entry requirements and make offers. Any applicant applying from outside of the UK is unlikely to receive a Tariff offer due to the limited number of international qualifications currently on the Tariff, even if they are applying with a qualification that has Tariff points.

The new Tariff should not change university or college entry requirements, and the standard of entry requirements at higher education providers should remain the same. New UCAS Tariff points should not have any impact on students’ decisions about qualification choices at school or college, or their preparation or application to a higher education course.

Advanced Placement (AP) Courses - updated

The new Tariff operates by multiplying the size of a qualification and its grading scale. For the AP, this means the following:

- **AP is allocated to the highest possible grade bands**
In terms of grade bands, which provide an indication of the standard of the qualification, the AP course has been allocated the highest grade band points possible, i.e. 14 points, the same as an A* at A level, for the 5 grade.

The existing UCAS Tariff separates AP courses into category A and B subjects based on the level of assessment, a distinction noted by the Tariff Expert Group a number of years ago. The new Tariff operates by multiplying a size by grade calculation to form the overall Tariff score. It was agreed with The College Board that it would be inappropriate to continue this distinction, especially given the ongoing redesign of AP courses and

² Technically speaking, the only IB Diploma on the UCAS Tariff is the Ofqual-accredited version.

exams. All AP courses now attract the same Tariff values, as agreed with The College Board.

- **The AP is not the same size as an A level due to it generally being a one year course.**

AP courses and exams are criterion-referenced and are aligned to first-year university level learning objectives in the US. Therefore The College Board does not specifically allocate a number of Guided Learning Hours to the qualification. However, it was agreed with The College Board that 135 direct learning hours and 30 indirect learning hours was an appropriate representation of the size of the qualification. A total of 165 hours resulted in the qualification being allocated to size band 2.

AP students take their AP courses alongside a wide range of other High School Diploma (HSD) classes and participation in an AP course presumes at least one year of preparatory work. HSD courses are non-standardised and so cannot be included on the new UCAS Tariff. HEPs who make offers based on the AP already take into account that the student is completing a HSD and may specify the successful completion of the HSD in their offers.

The change in Tariff points allocated to AP should not change university or college entry requirements. The standard of entry requirements for higher education courses for students with the AP should remain the same under the new Tariff.

We provide additional information to HEPs regarding the AP through the Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs). These can be found here: <https://www.ucas.com/members-providers/qualifications/qualification-information-profiles-qips>. The information in the QIPs is intended to enable HEPs to understand international qualifications in context and, in the case of AP, its role in a wider programme of learning.

Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) - updated

The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) was first allocated Tariff points in 2012.

The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) does not allocate a guided learning hour value based on the definition used in the UK. HKEAA is currently assessing the size of the individual HKDSE certificates to allow us to allocate an appropriate Tariff size band. The new Tariff points for the HKDSE should be confirmed by May 2016.

The grade bands allocated to the HKDSE will be aligned to the GCE A level.

Leaving Certificate (Ireland) - updated

A new Leaving Certificate grading structure has been introduced for the Irish Leaving Certificate first taught from September 2015 which will be awarded in 2017. As a result, UCAS has worked extensively with the Department for Education and Skills in the Republic of Ireland in recent months to allocate new Tariff points to the current and new Leaving Certificate.

Below are the key principles adopted in allocating new Tariff points to the current Irish Leaving Certificate at Higher Level and certain grades at Ordinary Level. These principles have also been used in setting new Tariff points for the new Leaving Certificate that will be

first awarded in 2017, to ensure there is a smooth transition to the new grading structure.

Current Leaving Certificate – Higher Level

- **Leaving Certificate Higher Level - grade bands**

The Leaving Certificate remains aligned to the A level in terms of grade points and has been allocated the highest grade band possible (14, the same as an A* at A level) for the A1 grade. Leaving Certificate D3 grade aligns to E at A level.

- **Leaving Certificate Higher Level - size bands**

The Department for Education has confirmed that the Leaving Certificate Higher Level is delivered within a 240 hour framework, so the qualification has been re-allocated to size band 3. The new total Tariff points retain the Higher Level Irish Leaving Certificate at circa 75% of an A level at each grade, as per the current Tariff.

- **Leaving Certificate Ordinary Level - grade bands**

As explained in the UCAS QIP for the Leaving Certificate, Ordinary Level grades A1 to C2 are aligned to Higher Level grades C1 to D3 in terms of demand. These Ordinary Level grades are aligned to NQF Level 3 and as a result they have been allocated new Tariff grade points at 6 -3. The lower grades of the Ordinary Level have not been allocated new Tariff points because they are not NQF Level 3. The new Tariff only includes Level 3 qualifications.

- **Leaving Certificate Ordinary Level - size bands**

The Ordinary Level has been confirmed as 180glh and is therefore in size band 2. Size band 2 points are multiplied against the grades of the Ordinary Level that attract Tariff points, i.e. grades A1 to C2, to provide new total Tariff points as shown in the UCAS Tariff Tables and the UCAS Qualifications List.

New Leaving Certificate – first teaching from September 2015

- The new Tariff points for the restructured Leaving Certificate will be published by UCAS in May 2016. The new grades have been aligned with the current Leaving Certificate in consultation with the Department for Education and Skills in the Republic of Ireland. UCAS has worked with the Department for Education in Ireland to support a smooth transition from the current structure to the new Leaving Certificate structure.

We provide additional information to HEPs regarding the Leaving Certificate through the Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs). These can be found here:

<https://www.ucas.com/members-providers/qualifications/qualification-information-profiles-qips>. The information in the QIPs is intended to enable HEPs to understand international qualifications, including the Leaving Certificate, in context and how they prepare students for higher education. An additional QIP will be published by July 2016 on the new Irish Leaving Certificate.

International A levels and the new Tariff

International A levels are not on the current Tariff. The UCAS Tariff allocates points to GCE A levels that are accredited by UK qualification regulators and so International A Levels are not awarded Tariff points. It is a continuing principle of the new Tariff that qualifications must be accredited by an appropriate regulatory authority as this provides independent quality assurance to support the allocation of Tariff points.

Consideration of International A levels is at the discretion of each university or college. However, International A levels are well-regarded by UK higher education providers. Most admissions teams use International A levels and GCE A levels interchangeably and don't draw distinctions between the two in their entry requirements.

Additional support on the new Tariff

Further information and resources for HEPs can be found on our website at <https://www.ucas.com/members-providers/qualifications/new-ucas-tariff>.

If you have any questions or would like to give us your feedback about the new Tariff, please email newtariff-feedback@ucas.ac.uk.

