

# UCAS Tariff

## Frequently asked questions TECHNICAL

July 2018 update

### Which qualifications are on the UCAS Tariff?

All Level 3/SCQF Level 6 qualifications that were on the legacy UCAS Tariff continue to attract Tariff points under the new system. The UCAS Tariff only contains qualifications at Level 3/SCQF Level 6 or equivalent (which equates to EQF Level 4). For example, it does not include Key Skills qualifications at Level 2 or 4. For qualifications outside of the EU, evidence is reviewed to make a judgement about their equivalence to this level.

### How are points calculated?

The UCAS Tariff operates as follows:

- qualifications are allocated to a size band of 1 to 4, based on their guided/notional (in Scotland) learning hours
- qualifications are also allocated to a grade band between 3 and 14. These grade bands spread across the breadth of Level 3
- the size band and grade band are then multiplied together to form the total UCAS Tariff score

UCAS will use qualification specifications that are regulated and other sources of regulated information where this is available and appropriate, to decide how to allocate grade and size bands to a qualification. Where little information exists, we may either ask regulators to provide an opinion, or in the case of international qualifications, ask the UCAS Qualifications Advisory Group to consider other sources of information. UK qualification regulators are part of the Qualifications Advisory Group which supports the UCAS Tariff process.

### Grade band points

Where there is no evidence to the contrary, the following rules have been applied:

Graded Level 3/SCQF Level 6 qualifications will be assumed to span the range of full Level 3/SCQF Level 6, i.e. from band 3 to 14, and grades will be evenly distributed across the bands, where possible. Where it is not possible to evenly allocate grades across the range because of the number of grades, the alignment will be as even as possible.

In principle, where a qualification is ungraded – i.e. pass/fail – a pass will be allocated to grade band 8, equivalent to the C grade at A level. However, in some instances where there is evidence that clarifies an ungraded qualification should be positioned at a higher or lower grade point, such as the legacy UCAS Tariff technical expert group evidence, or feedback from qualification regulators, alternative allocations have been made. For example, the AAT Level 3 Diploma in Accounting (QCF) has been aligned at the top of the grade scale at point 14.

For qualifications with three grades (e.g. D, M, P), grades have been aligned at bands 12, 8, and 4.

### Size bands

Where there is a size range given (e.g. because a qualification may have several optional routes), the lowest size is used to identify the size band.

Where a qualification is composed of a defined amount of content at other levels, the size band is allocated on the basis of the defined amount of Level 3 content.

### Total points

The size band and the grade band are multiplied together to form the overall UCAS Tariff score.

### How are composite qualifications allocated points?

Composite qualifications are not allocated overall points under the UCAS Tariff. Each of their constituent parts are allocated points, where these are accredited graded and have a guided learning hours/notional learning hours size allocation. For example, the International Baccalaureate is listed in terms of its constituent parts, with the Higher Level, Standard Level, Theory of Knowledge, and Extended Essay being allocated individual points because they are accredited. The Community, Action, Service (CAS) element of the Core does not have UCAS Tariff points because it is not accredited. This approach allows higher education providers (HEPs) to have the flexibility to combine points for the overall qualification, or focus on the constituent parts that are most relevant to their courses.

### How are UCAS Tariff points allocated to the AS qualification?

The AS grades have been aligned to lower grade bands than the equivalent A level grades, recognising that they are not at the same level of demand as the A level.

In June 2012, Ofqual launched a consultation regarding the future of A levels in England. In this, they asked for stakeholder views about the contribution of the AS to A levels. The findings indicated that the majority of HE and awarding organisations disagreed that the AS and A2 should have equal weighting. The findings also said there was a 'broad consensus' the AS did not represent 50% of the full A level, but the simplicity of the 50:50 split was appealing. A 40:60 split was proposed by many respondents.

Ofqual has consistently said the AS is less demanding than the A2. Feedback from the Qualifications Information Review (QIR) also indicated that HEPs did not feel the AS was equal in demand to an A level.

The Welsh government and Department of Education in Northern Ireland has decided the AS will contribute 40% to reformed A levels. Based on this information, and following a UK wide feedback exercise and detailed discussions with the UCAS New Tariff Advisory Group which comprised representatives from higher education, ASCL, AoC, and HESA, UCAS repositioned the AS qualification as close to 40% of the overall A level at each grade band point.

### **How have points been allocated to qualifications graded D\*DMP – aligned with Pearson BTEC National?**

For qualifications aligned with the Pearson BTEC National, with grades D\*, D, M, and P, the standard three grade alignment (12, 8, 4) applies, with the D\* aligned at band 14 – providing additional recognition at the top of the range. It does not operate as four grades evenly distributed across the range. This alignment of grades means there is no change to BTEC grades under the Tariff.

### **Are there any exceptions in the way UCAS Tariff points have been calculated?**

The process for applying Tariff points involves allocating a size and grade band based on public-regulated information, such as the qualification specification. For most qualifications that were on the legacy Tariff, we applied the Tariff calculation. However, a small number of qualifications had to be adjusted into the new scale to minimise disruption in terms of their ‘value’, in moving them to the Tariff. These decisions were carefully considered by the UCAS New Tariff Advisory Group. The commentary section in the UCAS Tariff qualification list (spreadsheet) details the approach used to derive the UCAS Tariff points for each qualification and grade.

The UCAS Tariff process involves an annual feedback exercise to encourage feedback from HEPs about qualifications used for progression to HE, and their UCAS Tariff point allocation. This feedback will be shared with the UCAS Qualifications Advisory Group and published each year – this should help ensure the allocation of UCAS Tariff points is appropriate, and any issues or misunderstandings concerning qualifications and/or their UCAS points can be addressed by the most appropriate party. This may be UCAS, an awarding organisation, a UK qualification regulator, or an individual HEP.

### **Discounting of similar subject/sector qualifications – which qualifications will count towards UCAS Tariff points?**

The application of the UCAS Tariff is at the discretion of individual higher education providers (HEPs). There is no built in discounting process. In general, HEPs only count the highest level of achievement in each subject. For example, an applicant holding both AS and A levels in mathematics would receive points only for the A level.

This approach is similar to the Department for Education (DfE) in England’s principle of ‘discounting’, which prevents schools and colleges from gaining performance points for a student with two qualifications which are either the same, or very similar. It is important to check with individual HEPs whether their points-based offers have any restrictions, including discounting principles. This will be particularly important over the next few years, when we will see significant changes to qualifications in the UK.

### **Is the new Access to HE Diploma on the Tariff?**

Following consultation with the HE sector, and input from the Quality Assurance Agency, Access to HE Diplomas are on the Tariff list, which came into effect for HE courses starting from September 2017 and onwards.

### **Will apprenticeships get UCAS Tariff points?**

Apprenticeships were not on the legacy Tariff and have therefore not been included in the UCAS Tariff. Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs) were published in November 2013 to provide more information on apprenticeships for HE admissions staff. However, as there have been significant changes to apprenticeships in parts of the UK over recent years, new QIPs have been produced with government departments, and UCAS is exploring how UCAS Tariff points might be allocated to Level 3/SCQF Level 6 Apprenticeships in the future. More information will be provided in due course.

### **What was the rationale for changing the UCAS Tariff?**

There were limitations with the legacy Tariff. It couldn't accommodate some vocational qualifications, and feedback was received during the UCAS Qualifications Information Review (QIR) consultation in 2012 about the appropriateness of the relative allocation of points to some qualifications, for example, the A level and AS qualification. Feedback from the QIR criticised the legacy UCAS Tariff method for appearing to favour a qualification's size, and the process was opaque. It was led by awarding organisations, who paid for the Tariff process because it was expensive to administer. The previous approach was based on complex domains which were considered biased towards academic qualifications. Changes to qualifications throughout the UK, such as general and vocational qualification reform, would have been difficult to accommodate under the previous framework. These challenges, along with demand amongst HEPs for more vocational and international qualifications to be added to the framework, were drivers for change.

### **How will awarding organisations be able to ensure new qualifications get added to the UCAS Tariff?**

Awarding organisations can check whether their qualification is included on the UCAS Tariff tables and qualifications list on the UCAS website at [www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/information-new-ucas-tariff-advisers](http://www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/information-new-ucas-tariff-advisers). Awarding organisations can also email UCAS to ensure we are aware of their newly accredited Level 3/SCQF Level 6 qualifications. The process for adding qualifications to the Tariff is explained below. It is no longer led by awarding organisations submitting their qualifications.

### How does the UCAS Tariff process work?

The Tariff process is more automatic than the legacy process. Using the size by grade calculation, UCAS will allocate Tariff points to Level 3/SCQF Level 6 qualifications using regulated information, i.e. qualification specifications. UCAS will seek advice from the UCAS Qualifications Advisory Group, to ensure the allocation of UCAS Tariff points is appropriate. UCAS will also share a list of qualifications due to come onto the Tariff with all HEPs each autumn, before the annual May update, and will seek feedback.

UCAS will identify qualifications to be included in the UCAS Tariff through feedback from schools and HEPs and by following a number of set principles, such as automatically adding qualifications that are regulated at Level 3/SCQF Level 6 in the UK and meet DfE performance measure criteria. All Level 3 qualifications that were on the legacy Tariff continue to attract Tariff points under the Tariff. Qualifications that are re-accredited as part of qualification reform, but are unchanged in terms of guided learning hours and grading structure, will continue to attract the same UCAS Tariff points. UCAS Tariff points for established or UK benchmark qualifications will only change if a qualification significantly changes in terms of its size or grading structure, as validated by UK qualification regulators through revised or new accredited specifications.

The UCAS Tariff point tables will be updated on the UCAS website on an annual basis every May. The updates will identify any changes in UCAS Tariff points as a result of changes to qualifications that have come through the re-accreditation process, and/or any new qualifications.

The UCAS Tariff process also includes an annual feedback process to enable HEPs to comment on qualifications. The process will encourage feedback on qualifications on the UCAS Tariff in terms of:

1. size band
2. grade band
3. overall UCAS Tariff score
4. other comments about qualification
5. QIPs

Positive feedback will be encouraged, as well as feedback on any qualification issues. This feedback will be discussed with the UCAS Qualifications Advisory Group which meets in October and March each year. It will also be shared with relevant awarding organisations, and a summary report identifying key actions being taken by different parties will be published on [ucas.com](https://ucas.com).

### HESA and the UCAS Tariff

HESA collects a range of data every year from universities, higher education colleges, and other differently funded providers of higher education across the UK. This data is then provided to UK governments and higher education funding bodies to support their work in regulating and funding higher education providers. HESA uses the UCAS

Tariff to help measure the types of qualifications held on entry among accepted applicants each academic year.

### **Will UCAS cap qualifications that count towards university admission or league tables?**

The number and range of qualifications universities and colleges request and accept is entirely at their discretion, and this may vary depending on the course and course provider.

UCAS is not involved in the construction of league tables. League table compilers decide their own metrics and approaches can vary. The data used to compile metrics on strength of cohort on entry, which use the Tariff points, are sourced from HESA.

UCAS has produced a key messages document for league table compilers. We also outline our view that universities should not be measured on the strength of entry cohort, i.e. the qualifications applicants hold when they enter a HE course. We suggest metrics should support social mobility, and should focus on the value added and positive outcomes for applicants completing HE courses.

### **Are UCAS Tariff points the same as Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) credit points or the Scottish Senior Phase Benchmarking tool (SPBT) tariff points?**

No. Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) credit points are points allocated to qualifications based on their size – ten learning hours are equal to 1 SCQF credit point. The Tariff points used in the SPBT are provided for benchmarking purposes, as a means of comparing attainment within and between schools.

For more information, email us at [qualsinfo@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:qualsinfo@ucas.ac.uk).