

UCAS

at the heart of connecting people to higher education

ADMISSIONS
PROCESS
REVIEW
**RESPONSE
FORM**

We hope to receive a high level of response to this consultation from all those who have a stake in the higher education admissions process. We want to understand as fully as possible those aspects of the proposals which you support and those which cause concern. Where there are perceived problems, we encourage you to put forward preferred solutions. All your responses will be carefully analysed and a summative report will be published in March 2012.

In order to assist with the analysis and evaluation of responses, we would be grateful if you would provide us with the information requested below. Please note that any information given will be held by us and will only be used for the purposes of consultation and research. You are not required to provide your name but we will treat your identity in confidence if you do give it to us.

| | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Name | |
| Job title | |
| Organisation | The Russell Group |

Are you replying as an individual or on behalf of your organisation?

On behalf of the organisation

Please indicate which of the following categories applies to you/your organisation?

Higher Education - University
 Higher Education - College
 Higher Education – Private provider
 School
 FE college
 Applicant or potential applicant
 Parent of an applicant or potential applicant
 Government body
 Non-Government body
 HE sector body
 Other (please state)

Please enter one of these categories below:

HE sector body

Application post-results: proposed system

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

(APR Consultation ref 23.6.1)

A system of application post-results would deliver a fairer admissions process because the applicant

| would submit actual results and the reliance on predicted grades would be removed | |
|--|---|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 3 |

| (APR Consultation ref 23.6.2) Applying post-results will not necessarily have positive impacts on equality and diversity. | |
|--|---|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2 |

| (APR Consultation ref 23.6.3) Two choices is an adequate number for Apply 2, allowing applicants both an aspirational and a more realistic application. | |
|--|---|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 3 |

| (APR Consultation ref 23.6.4) A system of application post-results may encourage a mechanistic approach to admissions with contextual and other data used less effectively. | |
|--|---|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2 |

| (APR Consultation ref 23.6.5) The lack of flexibility in the proposed post-results system may mean that HEIs are forced to reject candidates they might have accepted in the current system. | |
|---|---|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2 |

| (APR Consultation ref 23.6.6) Giving young applicants more time to make application decisions recognises how much they mature over the final year at school or college. | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1- strongly agree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: |

| | |
|---|---|
| 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | 3 |
|---|---|

(APR Consultation ref 23.6.7)

A post-results system will not be agile enough to provide a better experience for all groups of students; those with A levels, those with Scottish Highers and those with other academic or vocational qualifications.

| | |
|--|--|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2 |
|--|--|

(APR Consultation ref 23.6.8) Please specify any particular group of students whose needs would be less well met in a post-results system

Students with disabilities: currently once they have received an offer support services would get in touch, organise visits, conduct assessments, arrange accommodation, and so on. In a post-results system there would only be at most three weeks between a student finding out where they are going and the start of term.

Students with non-standard qualifications (also more likely to be mature students): may suffer in a system of mechanistic assessment based around A level results

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students whose post-16 learning has been disrupted: there will be less or no scope for holistic assessment and to take account of circumstances and contextual data, and it will be more difficult for those HEIs that give alternative offers to do so.

International students applying to institutions in multiple countries and holding offers from those in other countries well before they can begin applying to the UK

Students in schools where the summer term ends earlier, including those in Northern Ireland, Scotland and many international schools

Please enter any further comments about this section below

See paragraphs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.9 of narrative response.

We are not sure what the terms 'aspirational' and 'more realistic' applications would mean in a post-results context where applicants will know exactly what grades they have. We would be concerned if the suggestion was that applicants should be encouraged to use one of only two choices for a less competitive course or one with lower entrance requirements than the grades that the applicant has achieved in order to have a better chance of securing a place. A key element of the rationale for moving to applications after results is the assumption that applicants will have greater confidence and higher aspirations once they are certain of the grades they have achieved, so we would be concerned if applicants were to be discouraged from applying to competitive courses.

Application post-results: widening participation

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

(APR Consultation ref 24.8.1)

A wider group of applicants would be encouraged to make more aspirational applications with the confidence of knowing they have achieved appropriate qualification results.

- 1- strongly agree
- 2- agree
- 3- disagree
- 4- strongly disagree

Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

4

(APR Consultation ref 24.8.2)

Applicants would be deterred from making aspirational applications by having to make decisions quickly and being restricted to two choices.

- 1- strongly agree
- 2- agree
- 3- disagree
- 4- strongly disagree

Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

2

(APR Consultation ref 24.8.3)

Applicants may not understand the importance of contextual data and would be deterred from applying for some courses if they have not achieved the grades.

- 1- strongly agree
- 2- agree
- 3- disagree
- 4- strongly disagree

Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

2

(APR Consultation ref 24.8.4)

Widening participation would be supported by more constructive and focussed advice and guidance.

- 1- strongly agree
- 2- agree
- 3- disagree
- 4- strongly disagree

Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

3 [*Whilst we strongly agree that better advice and guidance would support widening participation, we do not agree that this would be the result of the APR proposals*]

(APR Consultation ref 24.8.5) How do you think a system of application post results could be managed to enable it to promote widening participation?

To manage a system of application post results more effectively, current arrangements would need to be changed much more fundamentally in order to allow a longer time period between results being known and admissions decisions made, enabling more holistic assessment and time for special access schemes. However, it remains the case that changing the timing of applications would do nothing to address the fundamental root causes of inequality such as attainment gaps.

Please enter any further comments about this section below

See paragraphs 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.8

In addition, it is important to be clear that achieving 'appropriate' qualifications would still be no guarantee of acceptance at the applicant's choice of institution. The fact that our institutions receive far more applications than they have places available would be unchanged. We would be concerned that a greater expectation might be created in the post results system of automatically gaining a place where advertised grades have been achieved.

It is far from clear that application post results would inevitably lead to better information, advice and guidance and there is no direct and clear link between changing the application timing and improving the advice received. One of our biggest concerns in relation to advice and guidance is the fact that some young people close off some university options through their choice of subjects post-16, and moving to applications post-results would not solve this problem. In fact, many of the issues identified in the review in relation to advice and guidance are not integral to the current system and could be addressed without changing the admissions process.

Application post-results: Efficiency improvements

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

(APR Consultation ref 25.18.1)

A post-results system is an efficient system as fewer applications require processing by HEIs.

- 1- strongly agree
- 2- agree
- 3- disagree
- 4- strongly disagree

Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

2 – (but as a result of reduced choices for applicants rather than post-results timing)

(APR Consultation ref 25.18.2)

A more efficient streamlined process would enable HEIs to make financial savings.

- 1- strongly agree
- 2- agree
- 3- disagree
- 4- strongly disagree

Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

2 – but whether the proposed process would in fact be more efficient is unclear, depends on a number of factors, and needs robust modelling

(APR Consultation ref 25.18.3)

A more streamlined process would make the process easier for applicants to navigate.

- 1- strongly agree
- 2- agree
- 3- disagree
- 4- strongly disagree

Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

3

(APR Reference 25.18.4) What disadvantages in terms of process efficiency, if any, could be experienced by HEIs, applicants or advisers as a result of a post-results system?

If students choose a narrow range of HEIs in Apply 2, which is possible, this could lead to a large number of sequential rounds or very large sequential rounds. It is clear that a post-results system could radically change the nature of the admissions workforce but it is difficult to tell whether this will be in a way more efficient. Currently, admissions staff are extremely well trained and professional, whilst those brought in

to increase capacity temporarily at times of high demand, such as the current Clearing period, may not be able to process applications at the same rate or to the same level of quality.

Please enter any further comments about this section below

Any system in which fewer applications are processed by HEIs is, of course, likely to produce efficiency savings, but the reduced number of applications is at the cost of reduced choice for applicants. It would be useful to be clearer about how much of the efficiency stems simply from reducing applicant choice within any system, and the desirability of reducing choice should be debated separately. Many of the efficiency improvements proposed in the document are not contingent on applying post results and could be made to the current system, so it would be useful to see a side-by-side comparison of the efficiencies possible through improvements to the existing system with those resulting from a move to APR. Of the £18m saving quoted in the consultation document, it would be helpful to understand how much arises from reducing the number of choices, how much from technological improvements unrelated to timing, and how much could be attributed directly to APR and on what basis. The initial cost of making these changes would also, of course, need to be factored in to any calculation of efficiency or savings eventually arising from that change.

Looking at the additional evidence provided on the UCAS website, we have a number of concerns about the robustness of the assumptions and quality of modelling that underpins the estimates of efficiency savings, particularly in relation to the costs of Clearing. To take but one example, the suggestion that there are 1.6m Clearing calls, each lasting 30 minutes, would mean that 100 HEIs each employ 100 people for 8 hours a day for the 10 days of Clearing just to answer calls. This does not seem realistic and questions the validity of the modelling. We are also not sure what assumptions have been made about the volume of pre-application contact between applicants and institutions in the proposed post-results system. As there will be no limit on the number of institutions a candidate could contact to express an interest, it is possible that some universities may even experience increased demand from applicant contact compared to the current process. Since any potential efficiency saving offered by a change in process would be a key attraction, it is important to ensure that this is robustly modelled.

See paragraph 2.10

Application post-results: International and part-time students

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

(APR Consultation ref 26.5.1)

It is desirable for international applicants to apply through a centralised system and not direct to HEIs.

| | |
|--|--|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 1 |
|--|--|

(APR Consultation ref 26.5.2)

It is desirable for part-time applicants to apply through a centralised system and not direct to HEIs.

| | |
|--|--|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2 |
|--|--|

(APR Consultation ref 26.5.3)

Access to improved data about international and part-time applications will be a benefit of being part of a central admissions service.

1- strongly agree
2- agree
3- disagree
4- strongly disagree

Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

2

(APR Consultation ref 26.5.4)

The proposed new process has the capacity to offer greater flexibilities which will support international and part-time admissions.

1- strongly agree
2- agree
3- disagree
4- strongly disagree

Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

3

Please enter any further comments about this section below

See paragraphs 2.14-2.16

Our institutions hear consistently overseas that the UCAS scheme is easy to use and that the benefits of submitting a single form, fee, personal statement and reference give us an advantage over major competitors. It is important to consider the disadvantages that a change of timing could create for UK HEIs aiming to compete internationally, both for overseas students and for home students who might be considering options abroad.

Application post-results: Examination, results and applications timetable

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

(APR Consultation ref 28.7.1)

The changes to the examination timetable should not have a major impact on the accuracy of assessment; with appropriate changes to their systems, awarding bodies should be able to maintain accuracy and rigour in a shorter marking period.

1- strongly agree
2- agree
3- disagree
4- strongly disagree

Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

3

(APR Consultation ref 28.7.2)

The option of starting the HE term for first year students in late October is worthy of consideration.

1- strongly agree
2- agree
3- disagree

Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

3

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| 4- strongly disagree | |
|----------------------|--|

| | |
|--|---|
| (APR Consultation ref 28.7.3) The option of starting the HE term for first year students in January is worthy of consideration. | |
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 3 |

| | |
|--|---|
| (APR Consultation ref 28.7.4) The resources available in schools and colleges will be sufficient to give students support to make applications and manage offers in the timescale proposed. | |
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 3 |

| | |
|--|--|
| (APR Reference 28.7.5) What provisions could be made within the educational and qualification structures in Scotland to make a UK system of application post-results workable for Scottish students? | |
| We do not think that the consultation document sufficiently considers or addresses the impact on Scottish applicants. We are concerned about the implications for schools, where the summer term generally finishes earlier than in England and before the application window would close. Changes would also be required to the timing of SQA Higher results being published - a fundamental change which would directly have an impact on other large scale changes already underway, such as the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence. We also note that in Scotland many applicants already apply with results in the current system and it is not clear how the proposed changes would benefit them. | |

| | |
|---|--|
| (APR Reference 28.7.6) What steps could be taken to secure parity for Northern Irish applicants whose school term currently ends at the end of June? | |
| <i>See paragraph 2.14</i> | |
| We are concerned about the implications of the proposed post-results system for schools and applicants in Northern Ireland where the school term finishes before the application window would open. | |

| | |
|--|--|
| Please enter any further comments about this section below | |
| Notwithstanding our other significant concerns about the proposed PQA system, HEIs would need assurances from awarding organisations that they would be able deliver accurate and rigorous marking in the time available before any such system could be introduced. Admissions staff will have less time within which to make decisions, so will need to be able to rely absolutely on the quality of the information they receive, and exam results may assume greater significance under the proposed system if there is reduced time and scope to take into account other information. Some of the main awarding organisations have already raised concerns about the implications of compressing the time period for examining and marking. | |
| Schools organisations will be better placed to comment on their capacity to support and advise students in the short application window after receiving results. We would have particular concerns that any impact on access to advice would disproportionately affect students from ‘widening participation’ backgrounds. | |

It is not clear how starting the HE term in late October would address any of the concerns with the proposed 2016 post-results system – the examination, marking and application timetable would need to remain the same as it would not be feasible for applicants to be submitting applications during the school summer holidays. We do not think that moving the start of the HE term to January is feasible, and think that it would have a negative impact on students. It is not clear how prospective students would be expected to spend their time and support themselves between leaving school in the summer and starting university in January, and they would face the disadvantages either of a shortened undergraduate degree course or of emerging from university at a different time to graduates from most other countries. As a January start would put the UK out of step with international practice it would also risk damaging the ability of UK higher education institutions to compete with those in other countries for the best applicants.

See paragraph 2.8

Application post-results: Proposed timetable changes

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

(APR Consultation ref 29.4.1)

An earliest start date of circa 8 October for first year students would not have a serious impact on the delivery of HE courses.

| | |
|--|---|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2 |
|--|---|

(APR Consultation ref 29.4.2)

Universities could make appropriate resources available to make offer decisions and process applications between mid-July and end August.

| | |
|--|---|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 3 |
|--|---|

(APR Consultation ref 29.4.3) Please give any suggestions about what needs to be done to ensure that interviews can be successfully completed within the proposed model of applications post-results.

Our institutions are fully committed to identifying those applicants with the greatest potential to benefit from the learning opportunities that they provide and excel on their degree courses. They would therefore endeavour to continue to conduct a fair, thorough and holistic assessment of every applicant, drawing on a range of information, but it would undoubtedly be very challenging to do so in such a compressed timescale. There is a long list of practical questions such as how interviews could be successfully conducted, how due diligence for medical students and CRB checks for those courses requiring them could be accommodated, and generally how a sufficient number of highly skilled admissions tutors could be made available. These questions would need further consideration, on the basis of much more detailed proposals, if the potential overall benefits of a post-results system were to be demonstrated by evidence.

(APR Consultation ref 29.4.4) Please give any suggestions how to accommodate applications for courses requiring auditions or the submissions of portfolios.

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

Please enter any further comments about this section below

See paragraph 2.12

Application post-results: Benefits and risks of the proposed 2014 year of entry enhancements

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

| | |
|--|---|
| (APR Consultation ref 31.3.1) A single offer date for all applications would help minimise the real or perceived advantages of applying as early as possible in the cycle. | |
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 3 |

| | |
|---|---|
| (APR Consultation ref 31.3.2) The current process can be improved with a more disciplined approach to deadlines, service level agreements for decision-making by HEIs, with no informal agreements to relax them. | |
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2 |

| | |
|--|---|
| (APR Consultation ref 31.3.3) The replacement of Clearing with a managed process of applications with equal consideration for places available at that point would give students a more positive experience and achieve a better match of applicants to courses. | |
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2 |

| | |
|---|--|
| (APR Consultation ref 31.3.4) A short break between Confirmation and Apply 3 would help to improve the process to place | |
|---|--|

applicants after they have received their results.

| | |
|--|---|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2 |
|--|---|

Please enter any further comments about this section below

See paragraphs 3.1-3.5

The insurance choice

| Option | Description | Benefits | Disadvantages |
|---|--|--|---|
| Keep insurance choice as is | A contractually-binding 2 nd choice, intended to offer a safety net to applicants not meeting the conditions of their firm choice | Supports applicants in making aspirational choices | Evidence shows that it is not well understood by applicants and is not used wisely |
| Remove insurance choice | Applicants accept one conditional offer and enter Clearing if they don't meet the conditions | Facilitates HEIs in managing their numbers | Does not support applicants in making aspirational choices; disadvantages recruiting institutions for whom the insurance choice may represent an important pool of applicants |
| Enforce correct use of insurance choice | Application system ensures that applicant has included at least one choice with lower entry requirements | Supports applicants in using the insurance choice as it was intended; fewer applicants needing to enter Clearing | Simple business rules don't reflect complexity of offers and what appears to be an unwise insurance choice may in reality not be, for instance for courses like medicine where the option for entry with lower grades does not exist. |
| Make insurance choice optional for HEIs | HEIs choose whether applicants can accept them as an insurance choice or only as a firm choice | HEIs for whom insurance choice is beneficial can continue with it; applicants can choose to apply to HEIs that accept insurance choice | More complex than current process and has capacity for unfairness |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Replace insurance choice with priority wait list option | Applicant chooses one firm choice and can be added to wait list for up to four others. HEI gives priority to waitlisted applicants once CFs have been confirmed | Provides some back-up for applicant but not contractually binding on HEI so facilitates number management | Provides less certainty for applicants than current process. Is complex and would be difficult to implement |
|---|---|---|---|

(APR Consultation ref 32.5)

In light of the information given above, please rank the options above in your preferred order (using 1 as the most effective through to 5 as the least effective).

| Option | Rank 1 to 5 |
|---|------------------------|
| Keep insurance choice as is | 1 (but see text below) |
| Remove insurance choice | |
| Enforce correct use of insurance choice | |
| Make insurance choice optional for HEIs | |
| Replace insurance choice with priority wait list option | |

Please enter any further comments about this section below

We do not agree that any of the options described above represent the best way forward on the insurance choice. We think that it is essential to retain the insurance option, but that further work should be also be done to ensure that it continues to provide an effective backstop for applicants, especially those applying to the most selective and oversubscribed courses and universities, whilst at the same time reducing the problems that it currently creates for some institutions.

See paragraph 3.6

Timetable for reform

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

(APR Consultation ref 33.2.1)

2016 year of entry is a manageable start date for a system of applications post-results.

| | |
|--|---|
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 3 |
|--|---|

(APR Consultation ref 33.2.2)

2014 year of entry is a manageable date to be ready for the proposed changes to the current system.

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1- strongly agree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|

| | |
|---|---|
| 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | 3 |
|---|---|

| | |
|--|--|
| (APR Consultation ref 33.2.3) We believe that the proposed changes for 2016 year of entry and 2014 year of entry are workable solutions. | |
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 3 |

| | |
|---|---|
| (APR Consultation ref 33.2.4) If the proposal for 2016 year of entry does not go ahead, further refinements are needed to the 2014 process. | |
| 1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree | Enter number between 1 – 4 below: <i>Would need to allow 2014 changes to be embedded and then review</i> |

| | |
|---|--|
| Please enter any further comments about this section below | |
| In relation to the proposal to move to application post results from 2016, this looks like a very challenging timescale. Changes are likely to be necessary to A levels in order for exams to take place earlier, and it looks unlikely that it would be possible to complete this process in time. The 2014 timetable is also ambitious and potentially risky. We would have reservations about the speed at which a new technical platform could be introduced and properly tested, and given the lead in time for the production of university prospectus information, all changes would need to be firmly agreed in the course of 2012 in order to be included. It would be more sensible to consider a slower timescale. | |

For more information about the UCAS admissions process review, please visit:

www.ucas.com/admissionsprocessreview

Responses must be received in UCAS by 20 January 2012.

Please complete, save and return this document via email to:

admissionsprocessreview@ucas.ac.uk

Or if you wish, print out a hard copy and return the document to:-

APR TEAM
UCAS
NEW BARN LANE
CHELTENHAM
GL52 3LZ