

UCAS Tariff review

July 2010

What?

UCAS announced on 1 July 2010 that it would begin a comprehensive review of the UCAS Tariff.

Why?

The UCAS Tariff has been in place since 2000, and was established to help universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs) make offers to applicants based on a wide variety of qualifications. In practice, this means that students can use a mix of qualifications at level 3 – from A levels to Advanced Diplomas to BTECs to international qualifications – to access higher education.

The Tariff continues to be an invaluable tool that supports admissions to higher education from an increasingly diverse range of qualifications. Whilst the rationale for such a tool is more important now than ever – with just over 50% of total UK-domiciled applicants in 2009 applying with a combination of qualifications other than three A levels* – there are some challenges in the current system that UCAS believes warrants a comprehensive review to future proof the Tariff.

Some of these challenges are:

- At the moment, not all qualifications that people use to apply for HE (both within the UK and internationally) are on the UCAS Tariff so it isn't a universal measure
- The Tariff is used in a variety of ways for which really isn't suited...for example, applicants see Tariff points as an absolute measure of the 'value' of qualifications, whereas the Tariff is more about the suitability of a particular qualification for progression into HE
- The current Tariff is a relatively blunt tool – the "UCAS points score" doesn't effectively explain the different criteria that have been used to indicate a given qualification's suitability for HE progression, or give HEIs the ability to quickly understand how a particular qualification may be more geared towards course A vs. course B
- There are some issues with the process of getting a qualification onto the UCAS Tariff that could be streamlined to make life easier for everyone involved in HE admissions

When and how?

Our intention is to undertake a comprehensive review that will be completed in 2012. **This review will not affect admissions practices for those students applying during 2010 or 2011.**

UCAS will establish a Tariff review steering group that will lead the review from start to finish. Once in place, this group will publish a full timeline for the review. Because the Tariff review will affect everyone involved in HE admissions – from awarding organisations who offer qualifications that may be suitable for HE progression, to admissions officers in universities, to applicants themselves – we want to ensure that our review is thorough and has the right outcome.

We envisage that the full review process, including a wide consultation phase, will take in the region of 18 months to two years. This timing also gives us the opportunity to look at the potential for sequencing the development of the UCAS Tariff with some of the other qualifications evaluations mechanisms that are in common use, for example the school and colleges achievement and attainment table scheme (AAT points, used in school 'league tables').

* Based on 2009 UCAS total applicant statistics (UK domiciled only)

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The first steps of the review are already underway – a full scoping of the project, and extensive research into options for a new qualifications evaluation tool. A series of focus groups with key stakeholders on all aspects of the Tariff will take place in the autumn, and the results of these will inform a wider consultation process, expected to begin in winter 2010. We expect to be able to begin modelling a new mechanism throughout 2011.

What happens in the meantime?

The Tariff review process must not be allowed to get in the way of the ongoing admissions cycle – it's our absolute priority to continue to ensure that the core business of UCAS (brokering the relationship between applicants and HEIs) runs smoothly.

So the current UCAS Tariff will remain in place for all those qualifications that currently have UCAS points, and HEIs can continue to make offers based on this measure.

UCAS is currently working with experts from across the HE sector on an interim process for assigning points to qualifications that aren't currently in the Tariff, and for accommodating changes to existing 'Tariffed' qualifications. Wherever possible, this will mean that at the point at which a new mechanism is ready, those qualifications that are in the Tariff already can be moved over to the new system with minimum disruption.

Who do I contact for more information?

You can keep up to date with developments relating to the Tariff review at www.ucas.com or direct your enquiries to tariffqueries@ucas.ac.uk