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	**Professor Peter Main**
Job tile	**Director, Education and Science**
Organisation	**The Institute of Physics**

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:* **Other: Learned Society and Professional 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: *1*

(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: *3*

(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: *3*

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

(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:** *3*

(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 who come from schools with low academic achievement may require particular encouragement to ensure equality of opportunity; for example, many universities admit such students with grades below the typical offer. In the current system, this may be done at relative leisure at the interview/open day stage but it is not clear that such students will be readily accommodated in the new system. There is a danger that, in the limited time available for decisions, universities, particularly those that are oversubscribed, would shift towards a straightforward, grades-based system at the expense of broadening access. Similar remarks may also apply to students with disabilities, who may wish to have discussions with universities about their particular needs. Such discussions fit easily in the current scheme but, in the revised version, they may place an unnecessary burden on the students to make contact with universities.

Please enter any further comments about this section below
So far as universities are concerned, the major change in terms of their relationship with potential entrants is that the number will be much larger, i.e. not restricted by the number of choices on a form. This may not make so much difference in subjects and universities that select students from a broad base of well-qualified applicants, but it might make a difference to those subjects/universities where the principal aim of inviting a student in is to persuade them to choose a particular department. For example, a non-Oxbridge but respected physics department might be looking at up to 2000 potential applicants; these cannot be accommodated in a reasonable number of open days.

The great benefit of the proposals, in principle at least, is that students can make realistic applications at Apply 2 and not have to gamble on what qualifications they will achieve. In addition, universities will know precisely what they are getting. But in order for the process to be fair, the admissions tutors must supply honest and accurate admissions criteria. The current system encourages game-playing, whereby tutors frequently admit students with lower grades than those publicised. In addition, they are not always completely open about which A-levels, or equivalent, offer a distinct advantage in doing the course http://www.score-education.org/media/3433/admissions_tutor.pdf. Such lack of transparency should have no place in the new system.

The essential problem running through the proposals is the need to compress the whole process into a few weeks at a difficult time of the year. This issue affects just about every aspect of the process but, in terms of student choice, it is not clear that student uncertainty will be much reduced from the current system. At present, students do at least have the guarantee of a place if they meet the required grades. In the proposed system, even if they meet the entrance requirements of their chosen course, they may find the course to be fully subscribed. While this uncertainty is not necessarily less fair than the current system, it does indicate that the advantages of a PQA system can only be truly realised is there is sufficient time for choices to be made on both sides. In addition, the restriction to two choices seems to be arbitrary and unnecessary; what is wrong with allowing students to list, in order, many more courses that they would find acceptable, provided they met the published entrance requirements?

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:** *2*

(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:** *3*

(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: *1 (ambiguous question)*

(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?

Widening participation is taken to mean primarily attracting students from the lower socio-economic groups and those from families without a tradition of higher education. It is difficult to imagine how the process could be managed at the level of the individual student but there are two ideas: first, for universities to be much more pro-active and transparent about how they might take into account mitigating factors. Second, and related, specific schools could be targeted for special consideration and students from those schools given tailored advice, based on the information from universities.

This issue is one of the key areas of concern in the proposal; disadvantaged students will only apply, indeed should only apply, if they have a realistic chance of success. That can only happen if universities make it absolutely clear that they welcome students irrespective of background, but there is a minefield of detail on how that can be achieved successfully.

One positive feature is that some students from lower socio-economic groups aim too low in the current system. With better A-level results achieved, they would probably be more aspirational in their choices.

Please enter any further comments about this section below

The key problem for widening participation in a PQA system is whether there is sufficient time for a university to build up a picture of an atypical student in the scramble that will follow the announcement of the results. Perhaps the solution is to use the period before the examinations with the universities offering outreach activities in appropriate schools.

A much larger barrier to widening participation, however, lies in the continual drift of universities to

insist upon higher and higher entrance grades, largely in response to the various league tables published in newspapers. A PQA system might conceivably cause universities to be less flexible about admitting students who do not achieve the required grades, which would act against widening participation.

More generally, it is not clear that two choices will be sufficient or how the process of managing admissions will occur. Significant features of the current system are that offers are binding on universities, provided that a student achieves the required grades, and that most decisions are made at a single point of time. In a PQA system, having the required grades will no longer be a sufficient criterion for acceptance and, because there are only a fixed number of places, presumably courses will fill as students accept the unconditional offers. Consequently, there could be more uncertainty than at present.

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*

(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: *1*

(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: *2*

(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?

The recruitment process would be compressed into a shorter time, which may require either recruitment or secondment of extra staff at a time when many academics are concentrating on research and administrative staff would normally be taking annual leave. Similarly, many students take advantage of the relatively large gap between the end of A-levels and the start of university to do a number of things (e.g. extended break, earning money, etc.) and this may be compromised.

Please enter any further comments about this section below

Many STEM departments act in a recruiting rather than a selecting mode: i.e. the purpose of the interview is as much to sell the course as it is to provide information. This statement is particularly true for universities not at the top of the pecking order. In the new system, either the university does not have open days at all until the results are available, which would be a high risk strategy, or they would have to have open days without any indication of which applicants were considering them as an option. Without any sort of pre-registration of interest that would make the individual names available to universities, a large increase in workload is envisaged. It is not clear in the documentation how the visits described in 23.5 would be facilitated; presumably, the prospective applicants would need to make individual contact, which may incur a substantial increase in administration not considered in the discussion on increased efficiency.

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: *2*

(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:** *2*

Please enter any further comments about this section below
It would be a definite advantage if a centralised system for international students could alleviate some of the severe visa difficulties currently being experienced across the sector.

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:** *2*

(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 4- strongly disagree	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** *2*

(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: *2*

(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?

The issues in Scotland are not appreciably different from those in England and Wales: earlier completion of school exams vs. later start for university sessions. Indeed, the Scottish Government has already mooted the idea of a PQA system, albeit in a Scottish rather than a UK context. It would be a pity if the two systems became so out of synchronicity as to be incompatible.

There are also three issues that are particular to Scotland. The first is that many Scottish universities have moved to a mid-September start of term and there is pressure to move even earlier; such changes are incompatible with the UCAS proposals. The second issue is that Scottish universities offer admissions at the Highers level and Highers courses last only one year. Therefore, any compression of the course would have correspondingly even more severe consequences than for A-level. Finally, many Scottish universities admit students according to their results in the Highers, even though the students might be taking Advanced Highers. In effect, this means that many Scottish universities are already operating a PQA system for some Scottish students.

The proposals in diagram 4 squeeze the examination period for Highers into 5 weeks from 6.5 weeks. In practice, the current system uses the first 2 weeks of the exam period for Standard Grade so, if nothing changed, this would be a compression of Highers from 4.5 weeks to 3 weeks, which would be very difficult to accommodate. If Highers were examined from the beginning of the examination period, that would place a severe strain on available space in many schools. The cut from 8 weeks to 4 weeks for the marking period is drastic and, while 8 weeks does seem luxurious, such a cut would raise serious questions of quality control. Another related issue is that the results are due out in the final week of June, traditionally the last week of term and one which is frequently used for field trips, etc. Without an extension of the school year, it is difficult to see how any reasonable time could be made for advice and consultation.

The most plausible route for Scotland would be to accept that admissions are on the basis of Highers but to expect students to do Advanced Highers before entering university, which already happens for many students. However, there are many obvious problems with such an approach, such as maintaining student interest. The alternative is that universities just start later, perhaps in January.

(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?

In Northern Ireland, there are similar concerns to the rest of the UK about the effect on the time available for A-levels. On the matter of the school year, the first two weeks of July constitute the main holiday period in Northern Ireland. While teachers tend to come into school in August when the results currently come out, it is far from clear that they would be available in the proposed new results timetable.

As elsewhere, the most obvious solution is for the universities to start their academic year later.

Please enter any further comments about this section below

The timetable is the crux of the issue for the proposed changes. It is regrettable that they require a reduction in the time available for A-level study. A recent report from the Institute of Physics http://www.iop.org/publications/iop/2011/page_51934.html indicates that many physics and engineering academics already have concerns about whether the current A-levels prepare students sufficiently for university entrance. One might expect universities to compromise a little more on timing. Indeed, many academics may actually prefer a later start as it would provide a little more breathing space for research.

There are many detailed school issues associated with the proposed change of timetable. The proximity of Easter and potential clashes with GCSE examinations could put serious stress on schools. For example, when Easter is in April, it is highly unlikely that any teaching would take place after the break.

One mitigating factor for the reduced time available for A-levels would be if the government stopped the separate examination of AS levels and also the resits of modules, as it has indicated that it might. Not only would this release valuable study time, it would also reduce the oppressive examination burden on students. Such arguments would not apply, however, for Scottish Highers.

In principle, there should be enough time and resource for the schools to offer advice and support following the release of results but (a) the difficulties in offering sensible advice in a completely untried system should not be underestimated, and (b) teachers will still want their 6 weeks holiday in the summer, so there would appear to be little prospect of advice from that quarter in August.

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:** *1*
(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:** *2*

(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.
See the comments above about selecting versus recruiting departments. **Currently, the Oxbridge admissions process is a significant distortion of the system, which, in principle, could be reduced in the new regime in that only students with outstanding results would apply and they could have realistic second choices. However, there must be a question about whether Oxford and Cambridge can accommodate the interviews in the set period.**

(APR Consultation ref 29.4.4) Please give any suggestions how to accommodate applications for courses requiring auditions or the submissions of portfolios.
No comment.

Please enter any further comments about this section below

It is almost a truism that any application system in which results of qualifying examinations are known will be superior to one where they are not. The crux of the issue, therefore, is the compression of the time available for students and universities to make their choices. It is almost certainly the case that the proposals do not allow sufficient time, particularly given that the time that is available overlaps significantly with the traditional holiday periods. It follows that, in order to realise fully the undoubted benefits of a PQA system, a more substantial change would need to be made to the structure of the academic year than is being proposed. Such a change would not be impossible but it would require further discussion beyond the current consultation.

In the context of the current proposals, many universities now start their terms earlier than they did some years ago in order to accommodate a modular system. There seems to be no good reason why they should not be able to return to the previous system for first year students. That then raises the question as to whether students in later years would follow the same timetable; traditionally, first year students arrive a week early to allow time for them to settle in. Either that would have to take place at a time when later-year students were already working or those students would need to start even later.

Another potential issue is that of course sponsorship, where external bursaries might be tied to specific courses or a student having a place on a course. It is possible that this might also affect widening participation if a student is not sure if s/he will get a bursary.

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: *2*

(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: *3*

Please enter any further comments about this section below

The short break would impose further pressure on an already tight time scale

The insurance choice

Option	Description	Benefits	Disadvantages
Keep insurance choice as is	A contractually-binding 2nd 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	Simple business rules don't reflect complexity of offers and what appears to be an unwise insurance choice may in

		enter Clearing	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
Remove insurance choice	3
Enforce correct use of insurance choice	2
Make insurance choice optional for HEIs	5
Replace insurance choice with priority wait list option	4

Please enter any further comments about this section below

In advance of any major change, it is probably best not to fiddle too much with details of the current system.

It is worth mentioning that, in some subjects and departments, where recruitment has been tough, the insurance system has not been used fairly in all cases. It has been common for universities to have headline admissions grades that are substantially higher than the level of student performance that they will actually accept. The motivation for this behaviour is somewhat circular: one cannot afford to have an offer below one's competitors because that will mean one cannot be first choice. However, universities frequently take students with lower grades than the offer, so that insurance choices are

not taken up. Therefore, universities do everything they can to avoid being an insurance choice, hence the inflated public offers. With change imminent, it is not worth addressing this issue but universities should accept that their behaviour has been partly responsible for the poor operation of the insurance system.

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:** *2*

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

(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:** *2*

(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:** *1*

Please enter any further comments about this section below

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

www.ucas.com/admissionsprocessrreview

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