



Department  
for Education

# Post-Qualification Admissions Consultation Response

**February 2022**

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Social Science in Government

CP 619





# Post-Qualification Admissions Consultation Response

Presented to Parliament  
by the Secretary of State for Education  
by Command of Her Majesty

February 2022



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ISBN 978-1-5286-3201-0

E02722903 02/22

Printed on paper containing 75% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
CEIAG	Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
DfE	Department for Education
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HEP	Higher Education Provider
IAG	Information Advice and Guidance
IB	International Baccalaureate
NUS	National Union of Students
OfS	Office for Students
POLAR	Participation of Local Areas Classification Groups
PQA	Post-Qualification Admissions
PQO	Post-Qualification Offers
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UCAS	The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UCU	Universities and Colleges Union
UUK	Universities UK

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## **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE POST-QUALIFICATION ADMISSIONS CONSULTATION**

The Post-Qualification Admissions (PQA) Reform Consultation sought views on changes to the current system of admissions to higher education (HE). The consultation was launched on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 2021 and closed on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2021. The target group for the consultation included education providers and their representatives, students, awarding organisations, and student bodies/groups.

In addition, two student questionnaires explored the views of both prospective and current students. These were launched in April 2021 and circulated through the Office for Students, The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and the National Union of Students (NUS).

York Consulting LLP (YCL) undertook an analysis of all responses to the online consultation and the student questionnaires (A level and equivalent Level 3 students and HE students).

Through initial analysis of a systematic sample of responses, a coding framework was developed and confirmed with the Department for Education (DfE). A set of up to ten codes for each question informed the thematic analysis of all qualitative responses. Analysis of open questions was supported by NVivo12 with themes illustrated by quotes. Responses to closed questions (quantitative data) were analysed using Excel.

The consultation sought views on two PQA models:

- Model 1: Post-Qualification Applications and Offers. In this model Level 3 results day would be at the end of July and the HE term would start slightly later in early October.
- Model 2: Pre-Qualification Applications with Post-Qualification Offers and Decisions. In this model applications would be made during term time, and HE offers then made after results day.

We have listened to the consultation responses which indicate that this reform would be a significant undertaking for both the HE and the school and college systems. Many respondents point out a need for the sector to focus on educational recovery and exam recovery as a priority, rather than wholesale system reform. Whilst there is some support for post-qualification admissions, this is not strong enough to indicate that this is the right time for such a major upheaval.

We will not be reforming the admissions system to a system of PQA at this time. Instead, we will continue to work with UCAS and sector bodies to improve transparency, reduce the use of unconditional offers, and reform the personal statement to improve fairness for applicants of all backgrounds.

The remainder of this document sets out the independent analysis conducted by YCL on behalf of the DfE and sets out detailed analysis of responses to the online consultation, student questionnaires, and emailed responses.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE CONSULTATION

There were 491 responses to the online consultation and 18 additional emails (email responses not aligned to the consultation questions).

More than one-third (180/479, 38%) of respondents were very or highly satisfied with the current system, while a slightly lower proportion (145/479, 31%) expressed dissatisfaction with the current system. The HE respondent group were most satisfied with the current system and the 'individual' respondent group the least satisfied.

Two-thirds of respondents (324/489, 66%) were in favour of change to a PQA system in principle, but many respondents were concerned by practical implications of how it could operate, and 60% respondents felt that the models of PQA would be either worse than, or no better than, current arrangements. The HE stakeholders overall were less in favour of changing the current HE admissions system.

Survey results indicated that A level and Level 3 students and university students valued some aspects of the current system but were critical of others. The majority supported the idea of receiving and accepting their offers from universities based on their actual grades. See below for more details:

Views on the general PQA reform among consultation respondents included:

- Support for PQA: It was stated by some respondents that PQA would offer better matching and reduce HE drop-out, alongside a more positive student experience. PQA was seen as a less complex process that offers more transparency and would reduce the likelihood of applicants 'gaming' the system.
- Disagreement with PQA reform: Some respondents felt that the current system was effective, or alternatively, expressed a view that PQA would not be a solution to problems associated with the current system. The main concerns raised in relation to both models but most prevalent in Model 1, was the contracted timescale which would negatively impact on interviews, tests, or auditions.
- Disadvantaged groups: There were mixed views about the impact on disadvantaged groups and the widening participation agenda. While some felt that PQA would promote social mobility, remove concerns about the unfairness of predicted grades, or encourage more aspirational choices, others expressed negative views. Some considered that PQA would have a negative impact on support, and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in school and college. This would result in insufficient support from higher education providers (HEP) for disabled students and put more pressure on accommodation. Some felt that an unintended consequence would be HEPs introducing more entrance tests.
- Predicted grades: Predicted grades were seen as frequently inaccurate, resulting in wasted time applying to inappropriate courses, and in need of reform. There were

concerns about the issue of 'over prediction' and pressure on schools and colleges to inflate grades.

- Impact of PQA timescales: The PQA timescales were frequently discussed. While some positive views regarding this were expressed, most respondents outlined concerns about the potential impact of compressed timescales for the exams process, student support and IAG, and for considered student decision-making.
- There was some confirmation for ruling out changes to Level 3 results day and the HE term starting between November and January. However, support was also expressed for a delay to the start of HE courses and the potential benefits of this in allowing more time for processing applications and a longer gap for prospective students.
- For both models, most respondents (77% or 357 for Model 1 and 77% or 346 for Model 2) agreed that there should be limits on the number of courses applied for. For both models, the 'HE' group were the most likely to answer 'yes' to this question (85% or 116 and 87% or 117 respectively), followed by the 'Schools and FE' group (80% or 103 and 82% or 103 respectively).

## **Model 1**

One-half (242/479, 50%) of those who provided an answer indicated that Model 1 would be worse than the current system; just over one-third (175/479, 36%) indicated that it would be better; and 63/479 (13%) felt that there would be no significant improvement.

The 'HE' group (82% or 111), 'Schools and FE' (53% or 70), and 'Other organisations' (42% or 14) were most likely to consider that Model 1 would be worse than the current system. A majority of the 'Students/student representatives' (55% or 11) and the 'Individuals' group' (62% or 99) considered that Model 1 would be better.

Those supportive of Model 1 considered that it would offer a fairer and more equitable system. Many outlined that it would be less stressful for students, help to raise aspirations, and promote greater social mobility. With results delivered prior to HE application, concerns about predicted grades would be addressed and courses better matched to students.

Key issues raised by respondents related to the effect of Model 1 on schools/colleges and on HEPs. Costs and the implementation process were also discussed.

There was discussion about the impact of the compressed Model 1 timeframe on schools and colleges and the need for support and IAG over the summer break. Other concerns related to the possibility of additional HE entry tests being introduced, a loss of time for HE planning, management and relationship building, and less time for contextual aspects of the admissions process to be considered.

Views around implementation included:

- The need for greater utilisation of technology for example, script scanners and zoom, to facilitate moving results day.
- Giving the HE sector an opportunity to review the revised admissions approach.
- Ensuring sufficient time for a new HEP operating model to be implemented effectively.

There were concerns about costs in the following areas:

- Recruitment of additional exam markers, school/college staff, and HE admissions staff required to facilitate Model 1.
- Legal challenges because of a compressed exam timetable.
- Training associated with implementation.

## **Model 2**

Two-fifths (40% or 188/471) of all respondents indicated that Model 2 would be better than the current system, and one-third (33% or 156/471) that there would be no improvement. Just over one quarter (27% or 127/471) of respondents indicated that Model 2 would be worse than the current system. However, the 'HE' group were less likely to consider that Model 2 would offer a better system when compared to other groups.

Approximately two-fifths (41% or 190) of respondents answered that 'yes', under Model 1 there would be implications for how students apply to HE. In relation to Model 2, this was just under a third (31% or 137). For both models the 'HE' group were most likely to say 'yes' - that there would be implications.

Those supportive of Model 2 were positive about the proposed application timeframe being based on the current system and the removal of unconditional offers. Many discussed that as HE offers would be based on actual grades, there would be better matching of students to courses.

As with Model 1, primary concerns were raised around the availability of support and IAG over the summer break. HE providers also stated that they would be less able to manage the admissions process and to plan and forecast student numbers. Challenges associated with fitting in entry tests, interviews or auditions would remain under Model 2 if these took place after results day.

Furthermore, respondents felt that Model 2, as with Model 1, could compromise application processing time, scope for considering contextual factors, and for accommodating those with additional needs. The view that student motivation may be reduced due to the removal of conditional offers was also expressed.

## **Both models**

### **Accommodating entry tests, auditions, and interviews**

The main challenges and solutions for accommodating entry tests, auditions or interviews were:

- **Challenges:** Many respondents felt that these could not be accommodated within 6 weeks post-results. This would result in more pressure on HE staff and would not accommodate applications to multiple courses. The view was expressed that HEPs would not have sufficient time to accommodate contextual factors in their decision-making and/or multi-stage applications (e.g., for medical courses). Some HEPs felt it could create an unfair process by implementing an earlier selection process and there were concerns about the staffing and resourcing in HEPs within a condensed timeframe.
- **Solutions:** In contrast to the views outlined above, some respondents stated that these could be accommodated in the 6-week timescale. Solutions included HEPs assigning 2 weeks for interviews; a move to online (e.g., entry tests, audition recordings) and that there would be less need if grades were already known. Many respondents felt these tests, auditions and interviews should take place across the year (before results), facilitated by the early release of applicant data to HEPs. Specifically with reference to Model 2, it was suggested that interviews, auditions and assessments could take place before results day and after applications have been made.

### **How quickly applications could be processed**

The HE provider groups were asked for their views on how quickly applications could be processed. The main areas discussed were as follows:

- **Challenges:** The HEP respondents reiterated concerns that these could not be accommodated within the compressed timescales. As such, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and course specific requirements (e.g., for nursing, medicine, music, and art courses) could not be completed effectively. In addition, the impact on HEP resources was discussed in relation to a perception that more admissions staff would need to be recruited to support the process.
- **Solutions:** Some solutions to processing applications more quickly were proposed. These included conducting interviews online, standardisation of tests across HEPs, the use of central test centres, and the removal of an interview requirement for some courses. Many respondents suggested some application processing should take place during term time, again facilitated by the early release of applicant data to HEPs.

- Many respondents outlined their concerns about the impact of PQA on disabled and disadvantaged groups who would require needs assessments and special arrangements to be put in place for example, adapted accommodation.

### **Personal statements**

There was little support for the removal of personal statements, with less than one-quarter of respondents (23%) indicating support for this. Many felt that personal statements would still have an important role to play and are beneficial for students. However, there was some appetite for the format and content of personal statements to be reformed.

### **Limits to the number of courses students can apply to**

For both models, most respondents (77% or 357 for Model 1 and 77% or 346 for Model 2) agreed that there should be limits on the number of courses applied for. For both models, the 'HE' group were the most likely to answer 'yes' to this question (85% or 116 and 87% or 117 respectively), followed by the 'Schools and FE' group (80% or 103 and 82% or 103 respectively).

### **Other comments**

Other comments consistently raised across the consultation responses included the need for consideration of the impact on all UK countries, where different systems are in place; and the needs of international applicants. The impact on Scottish students was frequently discussed. If international students were included in the PQA process this would have a negative impact on the UK's HE sector. As such, many respondents agreed that international students should be out of scope.

### **A level and equivalent Level 3 student views**

A level and equivalent Level 3 students found some aspects of the current system 'very easy' or 'fairly easy': choosing their course (61% or 42 respondents out of 69), references (81% or 56) and UCAS timescales (62% or 43). Proportions were lower for choosing their university (43% or 29), use of predicted grades (37% or 26) and use of personal statements (25% or 17). The qualitative responses supported this with frustrations about predicted grades, which were regarded as stressful. Some would have liked more support to understand and challenge their predicted grades.

When asked which aspects of the UCAS application system they would like to see changed, many cited the use of predicted grades. This was followed by those who said

nothing needed changing and then subsequently by those who felt deadlines for accepting offers or applications and personal statements needed changing.

When asked why these things should be changed the most common responses were:

- To create a fairer and more objective system (especially in relation to predicted grades but also Centre Assessed Grades).
- To provide more time to plan with quicker responses by universities.

Nearly two-thirds of A level and equivalent Level 3 students (64% or 463) thought it would be better for students to receive and accept their offer from universities 'based on their actual grades', with just over a quarter (28% or 205) saying 'based on predicted grades'.

When asked what support they might need if they applied or were given offers to university during the summer holidays, two-thirds (67% or 482) said 'yes, I would need support with applying' and two-fifths said 'yes, I would need support making decisions' (42% or 305).

### **University student views**

University students found many attributes of the current system 'very easy' or 'fairly easy', such as: choosing their course (71% or 630 respondents out of 886), choosing their university (64% or 558), getting references (68% or 603) and UCAS timescales (70% or 617). However, fewer rated use of predicted grades (35% or 312) and personal statements (34% or 298) as 'very' or 'fairly easy'. Qualitative responses supported this with major frustrations about predicted grades and personal statements expressed.

Many reported dissatisfaction with the current university admissions and acceptance timescales, which were considered stressful. A minority found that getting references from schools and colleges had been difficult. Seventy-two percent of students (523) said that they thought it would be better to receive and accept their offer from universities after they had received their achieved grades in the summer. Just over two-fifths (41% or 321) thought that this might have changed their course or university choice. When asked why this would have had an impact, they said they would have had better options and made better choices.

Around two-fifths (41% or 321) of students said that their predicted grades affected their choice of course or university. The qualitative responses indicated that some made 'pragmatic choices' (e.g., securing a place at a lower tariff university), with respondents describing making poor choices and/or not going to their preferred university.

# 1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

## Aims

The Post-Qualification Admissions (PQA) Reform Consultation aimed to gather the views of stakeholders on proposed changes to the current system of higher education (HE) admissions, to a system of post-qualification admissions. This review of the admissions systems forms part of the Government's wider strategy for post-16 education reform.

The current system of pre-qualification admissions to undergraduate HE, in place for the past 50 years, requires that applications are made to the University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) from September to January in the second year of completing a Level 3 qualification. Students can apply for up to five courses, with the majority of offers based on predicted grades, personal statements, and other relevant contextual information.

An institution offers a place on condition that a student achieves certain grades at Level 3. Based on offers, students select a first choice and insurance choice. Results day in August then determines whether they secure their first choice, insurance choice, or neither.

A second application window is operated by UCAS, running from July to October (Clearing), which enables those who change their mind or receive lower than expected grades, to apply to alternative courses. UCAS Adjustment is available to students who exceed their expected results and wish to apply to a higher tariff course.

These features, along with an expansion in the range of qualifications that students can apply to universities with, has led to an increasingly complex admissions system. In addition, student numbers have increased significantly; the proportion of 18-year-olds accepted onto a university course was at its highest at pre-results stage in 2019, at 34%<sup>1</sup>.

It is within this context that changes to the pre-qualification admissions system were proposed. A UCAS review of admissions in 2011<sup>2</sup> proposed a model of post-qualification admissions that involved moving forward A level and equivalent Level 3 exams so that applications could be made after results in July. Responses received through the consultation showed that, whilst there was support for the principle of a PQA system within the education sector, there were widely held concerns about the practicalities of implementation. The review did not recommend a move to PQA.

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<sup>1</sup> Universities UK. Growth and Choice in University Admissions (2018) Retrieved from: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2018/growth-and-choice-in-university-admissions-final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> UCAS. Admissions Process Review: Findings and Recommendations (2011) Retrieved from: [https://www.ucas.com/file/776/download?token=6U\\_ClbPI](https://www.ucas.com/file/776/download?token=6U_ClbPI)

Since the 2011 UCAS review, there has been much research and debate about the merits and disadvantages of a PQA system. Critics of pre-qualification admissions argue that the unreliability of predicted grades adds a greater level of uncertainty to an already complex system.

A 2016 UCU report<sup>3</sup> found that only 16% of applicants' grades were accurately predicted, with 8.5% of grades being under-predicted and 75% over-predicted. It is argued that this level of uncertainty within the current system leads to a mismatch between students and courses, with associated concerns about reduced social mobility.

In contrast to this, the Sutton Trust<sup>4</sup> reports that the number of high achieving applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds who are under-predicted each year is relatively low, at approximately 1000 students. Furthermore, the UCU reports<sup>5</sup> that disadvantaged applicants, at the lower end of the grade spectrum, are much more likely to be over-predicted. It is therefore argued that this larger group of students could potentially be at a greater disadvantage under a PQA system.

Another concern about the pre-qualification admissions system is the recent growth in unconditional offers<sup>6</sup>. Since the lifting of the student numbers cap in 2015, universities have faced increasing competition. This has led to a rise in the use of unconditional offers to attract students. Universities UK reported that the proportion of 18-year-old applicants receiving at least one unconditional offer has increased from less than 1% in 2012 to 17.5% in 2017<sup>7</sup>. It is felt that these types of offers can negatively impact student decision-making and research suggests they may have a demotivating effect on applicants, leading to lower than expected attainment at Level 3<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> University and Colleges Union. Predicted Grades: Accuracy and Impact (2016) Retrieved from: [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8409/Predicted-grades-accuracy-and-impact-Dec-16/pdf/Predicted\\_grades\\_report\\_Dec2016.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8409/Predicted-grades-accuracy-and-impact-Dec-16/pdf/Predicted_grades_report_Dec2016.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Sutton Trust. Rules of the Game: disadvantaged students and the university admissions process. (2017) Retrieved from: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Rules-of-the-Game.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> University and Colleges Union. Predicted Grades: Accuracy and Impact (2016) Retrieved from: [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8409/Predicted-grades-accuracy-and-impact-Dec-16/pdf/Predicted\\_grades\\_report\\_Dec2016.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8409/Predicted-grades-accuracy-and-impact-Dec-16/pdf/Predicted_grades_report_Dec2016.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> An unconditional offer refers to when an offer is made to an applicant that is not dependent on them achieving certain grades at Level 3.

<sup>7</sup> Universities UK. Growth and Choice in University Admissions (2018) Retrieved from: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2018/growth-and-choice-in-university-admissions-final.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> UCAS. UCAS end of cycle report. Insight report: Unconditional offers – the applicant experience. (2019) Retrieved from: <https://www.ucas.com/file/292731/download?token=mvFM1ghk>

The response from Russell Group universities to the 2011 UCAS admissions review<sup>9</sup> suggested that the shortened application window, required for a PQA system, may limit applicants' ability to make a fully informed decision and institutions' ability to thoroughly assess applicants. Schools and further education (FE) providers also expressed concern about reduced teaching time and a reduced capacity to support applicants over summer. It was also felt that under a PQA system, students would lose the motivation that often comes with having a conditional offer.

Students have mixed views about the admissions system and potential changes. The Universities UK Fair Admissions Review<sup>10</sup> reported that, whilst 70% of applicants think the current admissions process is fair, a majority (56%) would nonetheless prefer offers to be made post-results.

The 2021 consultation on Post-Qualification Admissions in Higher Education therefore sought to provide an updated picture of the views of stakeholders on proposed options for a PQA system.

## Objectives

The objective of the consultation was to gather feedback on two proposed models for a PQA system, as well as suggestions for how a PQA system could best be implemented across the education sector. Targeted questions aimed to gather feedback from schools, HE and FE providers, and Awarding Organisations. Separate student questionnaires gathered views from recent and prospective applicants. Both models proposed within the consultation document involved moving the timing of Level 3 results day. Models involving no change to Level 3 results day, but instead significant changes to university term dates, were ruled out.

**Model 1:** 'Post-Qualification Applications and Offers' would see results day moved forward to the end of July and the HE term starting slightly later in early October. It is expected that this would be achieved by compressing the exam timetable and marking period. However, moving exams forward has also not been ruled out. These changes would create a 6-week window for students to make applications and for universities to make offers.

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<sup>9</sup> UCAS Admissions Process Review Consultation A response from the Russell Group of Universities. Retrieved from: <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/media/5057/19russell-group-consultation-response.pdf>

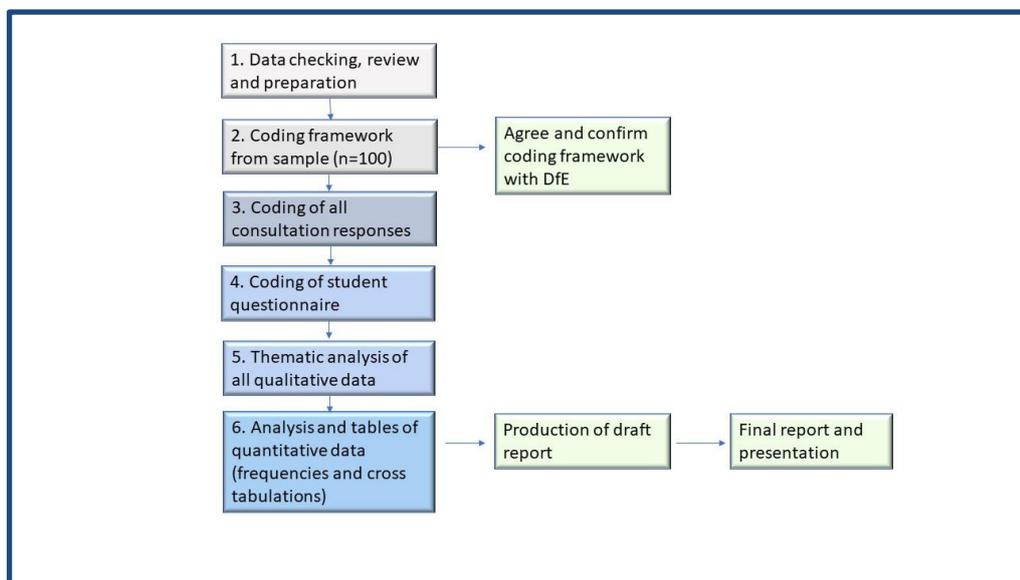
<sup>10</sup> Universities UK. Fair Admissions Review. (2020) Retrieved from: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/fair-admissions-review.aspx>

**Model 2:** 'Pre-Qualification Applications with Post-Qualification Offers and Decisions' would involve the application period remaining during term-time, but with offers made to students post results day. Applications would be held by a third party such as UCAS until after results day, which would be brought forward by a few weeks to allow time for offers and decision-making.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach for analysis of the PQA consultation is shown in Figure 2.1 below:

**Figure 2.1: PQA consultation analysis methodology**



### Data checking, review, and preparation

Preparation of a draft coding framework for each of the 28 open questions was undertaken. Coding themes were identified using an initial set of 100 respondents from the early responses to the online consultation (205 responses had been received at the end of April 2021). This approach was based on selecting up to 10 key themes per question. Further review and revisions of the coding framework were undertaken once the final set of online responses was made available (end of May 2021).

Confirmation was sought from the DfE that the draft coding framework met expectations regarding the scope of anticipated responses. Feedback on themes was incorporated into the coding process where relevant.

Data sets were uploaded to NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software. This involved the following:

- The themes from the coding framework were set up as thematic 'Nodes' in NVivo.
- All respondent data (online consultations) were coded under the thematic nodes (this included 'other' coding).

- Review of each code by reference rates was used to determine the final coding framework (see Appendix 1). In cases where the number of references was very low (under 30) consideration was given to merging these into other codes.

All coded data was retained in the NVivo file and results from the sample coding recorded (see Appendix 1) including:

- The number of codes for each question and an additional 'other' code was created for each question to capture any additional themes.
- The number of references for each code (node) was recorded.

## **Student Surveys**

York Consulting analysed selected qualitative responses to surveys of university and A Level and Level 3 students exploring their views on the university application system.

## **Analysis of email responses**

Responses to the PQA consultation that were submitted by email were collated. The process for this included:

- Emailed responses were reviewed with reference to the format and scope of the information included.
- Some were added into the main consultation data file, where they responded to the same questions as the overall consultation.
- Other emailed submissions that did not conform to the order and/or questions included in the online consultation were analysed using a separate process.
- Emailed submissions were coded under the six headings of the consultation analysis focusing on views: of the present admission system; in favour of changing the system; Model 1; Model 2; Other models; Other issues.
- The results from the analysis of coded data were reviewed in line with the online consultation responses. Consideration was given to areas of consensus and to expressed views that differed to those submitted to the online consultation.

## **Analysis of the final data sets**

The respondent groups for the analysis of closed and open questions were determined by grouping of responses to questions three and four (Are you responding as an individual, or as part of an organisation?). This is shown in Table 2.1.

Questions analysed by Groups (1 to 5) as outlined in Table 2.1 were the closed quantitative questions included in the consultation analysis (please see Appendix A for all questions included).

Analysis of the qualitative responses to the student surveys was undertaken as a separate exercise. The results from this have been included within the main report under the relevant consultation section.

**Table 2.1: Stakeholder groups**

<b>Groups for analysis</b>	<b>Respondent groups included</b>
1. Higher Education (HE)	Higher education providers and their staff, higher education stakeholders, representative bodies, and related charities.
2. Schools and Further Education (FE)	Schools and further education institutions and their staff, careers advisers, teachers and leaders, representative bodies, and charities (including unions and school/FE relevant bodies and awarding organisations relevant to this category).
3. Students and student representatives	Students who have been through the higher education application system or plan to do so in the future, and representative bodies/groups that represent them.
4. Individuals (other)	Including parents/guardians, and other respondents.
5. Other organisations	Organisations and charities that fall outside the scope of above groups or have a broader agenda e.g., think tanks and research organisations.

### **Analysis of consultation data: challenges**

A range of challenges were identified during the analytical process. These specifically related to the qualitative responses provided by those participating in the consultation. The key challenges identified were:

- Some of the respondents provided complex and very detailed information in their answers to individual questions. Wide ranging and detailed responses were frequently provided to the earlier sections of the consultation, and in many instances the respondents addressed subsequent questions as part of their initial answers. Therefore, the analysis of initial questions has been focused on describing the range of issues raised by respondents to avoid repetition across the reporting.

- Respondents in some instances included references to web-based material to support their arguments or to signpost to sources of evidence. Any web addresses included in a response have not been incorporated into the coding process, although have been incorporated into the wider evidence base by DfE officials.
- This report conveys the key messages arising from the analysis of the consultation responses. It intentionally does not provide challenge or critique on the key messages, for example, checking of links to published data as part of responses provided.
- Participation in the consultation was on a self-selecting basis. The findings in the report therefore carry the unavoidable risk of self-selection bias.
- Some respondents re-iterated their views across the questions, occasionally using the same wording. This resulted in a level of repetition across the text responses and different questions and sections. The analysis has aimed to capture the range of responses provided to each question and to reflect all views. As such, key issues are repeated.
- Many responses were also inconsistent with the question being asked, or in addition to providing a level of response to the question asked, then strayed into another subject area. Again, this made the task of coding more complex and introduced greater subjectivity to the analysis.

## **Data interpretation – some considerations**

Respondents were invited to provide their views in relation to the questions in the online consultation. As such all data analysed for this report is based solely on the perceptions of this group of respondents.

This Government consultation invited responses from both individuals and organisations. It is likely that organisational responses reflect the perceptions of a large body of individuals and may therefore be considered more representative than those from a single individual.

## **Report Structure**

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Characteristics of the respondents: this section provides an overview and profile of the online and email/written responses to the consultation.
- Results of the PQA Government Consultation: this section provides key findings under each of the consultation questions:

The following appendices have been included:

- (A) Main consultation questions and associated coding framework tables.
- (B) Student surveys – tables of results.

### 3 THE ONLINE CONSULTATION: ANALYSIS OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

#### Consultation Respondents

A total of 491 responses were made to the online consultation questions. A further 18 provided email responses (responses that were not aligned to the PQA consultation questions). Responses to the main online PQA consultation are shown in Table 3.1 below for each of the stakeholder groups (stakeholder group was not provided by one respondent).

**Table 3.1: Respondents by stakeholder groups**

Stakeholder Groups	No. of respondents in group	Proportion of group %
1. Higher Education (HE)	141	29%
2. Schools and Further Education (FE)	132	27%
3. Student and student representatives	20	4%
4. Individuals (other)	160	33%
5. Other organisations	37	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021

Note: percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

#### Stakeholder Groups

##### Higher Education

The 'Higher Education (HE)' respondent group included the following:

- English universities (n=107).
- Scottish universities (n=10).
- Welsh universities (n=3).
- HE representative organisations (n=14).
- Other providers or organisations (n=7).

## **Schools and Further Education**

The 'Schools and Further Education (FE)' group included the following (details were available for 125 responses):

- Schools and sixth form colleges (n=96).
- International schools (n=3).
- Education – organisations (n=13).
- Colleges and FE providers (n=13).

## **Student and student representatives**

The 'Student and student representatives' group included:

- Child or young person (n=17).
- Student representative organisations (n=3).

## **Individuals**

The 'Individuals' group (n=157) indicated their grouping as:

- Parents (n=67).
- Other (n = 90).

## **Other organisations**

The 'Other organisations' group included:

- Charitable organisations (n=9).
- National (education and student related organisations) (n=28).

## **Student surveys**

The analysis below explores how representative the final student survey data sets were, based on data provided by DfE. The attributes of the respondent group were identified in relation to the questions asked in Section One of the online consultation "About you?". This does not include questions 1-2, 4 (a and b), and 6-8 to protect the confidentiality of respondents.

The university student survey, designed and administrated by DfE, achieved 1,023 responses although only 976 were "ordinary residents" and "living in England". Analysis was undertaken to compare the spread of respondents across the POLAR4 quintiles with the student population to check if they were representative. Just under three-quarters of

respondents (74%) provided post codes. Of these, 89% were matched to a POLAR4 area. Table 3.2 indicates that there is broad representation with an even balance across the quintiles. Compared with 2020 applications, lower participation areas (quintiles 1,2,3) are over-represented, and the highest quintile (5) is under-represented.

**Table 3.2: University student survey respondents compared with UK 18-year-old accepted applicants, in 2020, by POLAR4 quintile**

	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>UK accepted applicants</b>
<b>POLAR4 Quintile</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Q1	17%	11%
Q2	18%	15%
Q3	22%	18%
Q4	21%	23%
Q5	23%	33%
Total	100%	100%

Source: UCAS, Undergraduate sector level end cycle data resources, 2020

The A level and Level 3 student survey, designed and administrated by DfE, achieved 1,025 responses although only 722 said they were a Year 13 (sixth form or second year college) student living in the UK who had submitted a university application.

- Only a small proportion completed the quantitative questions.
- The balance across the POLAR4 quintiles looks to be under representative of quintile 1 and over representative of quintile 5.

**Table 3.3: A level and equivalent Level 3 student survey respondents by POLAR4 quintile**

<b>POLAR4 Quintile</b>	<b>Respondents %</b>
Q1	9%
Q2	15%
Q3	19%
Q4	21%
Q5	35%
Subtotal	100%

Source: YCL analysis of A level and equivalent Level 3 student survey data, 2021

## 4 INITIAL QUESTIONS

### Question 1: Satisfaction with the present admission system

**On a scale of 1-5 (where 1 = highly dissatisfied and 5 = highly satisfied), how satisfied are you with the present admissions system?**

A total of 479 responses were given to the above question. More than one-third (180/479, 38%) of respondents were very or highly satisfied with the current system, while a slightly lower proportion (145/479, 30.5%) expressed dissatisfaction with the current system. Nearly one-third (154/479, 32%) had a neutral view on this.

**Table 4.1: Satisfaction with the present admissions system**

Satisfaction Rating	Number	Proportion of group
1	42	9%
2	103	22%
3	154	32%
4	161	34%
5	19	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=479.

For stakeholder groups, HE (59%) was most likely to be highly/very satisfied with the current system, followed by Schools and FE colleges (36%). Individual respondents were the most likely to be highly/very dissatisfied with the current system (49% of this group).

**Table 4.2: Satisfaction with the present admissions system by stakeholder group**

<b>Stakeholder group</b>	<b>Highly/very satisfied</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Highly/very dissatisfied</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
HE (n=134)	79	59%	11	8%
Schools and FE (n=131)	47	36%	37	28%
Students and student reps (n=20)	7	35%	7	35%
Individuals (n=160)	39	24%	78	49%
Other organisations (n=33)	8	24%	11	33%

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=479.

## Question 2: Changing the current Higher Education admissions system

Would you, in principle, be in favour of changing the current Higher Education admissions system to a form of post-qualification admissions, where students would receive and accept university offers after they have received their A level (or equivalent) grades?

A total of 489 responses were received for the above question. Two-thirds of respondents (324/489, 66%) were in favour of this change. The results for this question are shown in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Responses for changes to the current HE admissions system**

Response breakdown	Number	% Proportion of Sample
Yes	324	66%
No	151	31%
Not Answered	14	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=479.

Except for the 'HE' group, stakeholders were in favour of changing the current HE admissions system to a form of post-qualification admissions (PQA). More than half (52%) of the HE stakeholder group indicated opposition to this proposal. While among the 'Individual' group the converse was true, with less than one fifth (18%) opposing this proposal. The results are shown in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Support for and opposition to changing the current HE admissions system by stakeholder group.**

Respondent Group	Yes	Proportion of group (%)	No	Proportion of group (%)
Higher Education (n=131)	63	48%	68	52%
Schools and FE (n=132)	96	72%	36	27%
Students and student representatives (n=20)	14	70%	6	30%
Individuals (other) (n=160)	131	82%	29	18%
Other organisations (n=31)	19	61%	12	39%

Views expressed in response to this question (text responses) were wide ranging. The key issues discussed related to the impact of proposed changes on disadvantaged students or young people; discussion of the impact of changes to the timescale between results and the start of the university term; and the accuracy of predicted results. Roughly equal volumes of text referred to either disagreement with PQA proposals or support for them. Some respondents expressed both positive and negative views about PQA in their answer. The main issues discussed are outlined below.

### **Support for PQA (133 references)**

There were many references to the positive impact of a change to a PQA admissions system. These incorporated the following points:

- It would offer a fairer system that is no longer based on predicted grades.
- Agreement with and confirmation of the issues as set out in the consultation document.
- The view that anxiety and stress among prospective students would be reduced because of PQA.
- Comments on the current admissions system. Some felt that this was not fit for purpose or that the time was right for review and reform.
- There was a perception that a reformed admissions system would result in simpler processes, higher levels of reliability, and less uncertainty.
- Some felt that the current admissions process has become very complex and inefficient, with a resulting administration burden on universities and poor understanding of the Clearing and Adjustment processes. Others expressed a preference for one of the models and/or the UCAS proposed model and stated their reasons for this. Overall, a preference for Model 2 was more widely expressed.
- Others expressed the view that while they were supportive of reform and of PQA in principle, they were concerned about the impact of tight timescales resulting from this and outlined their thoughts on what would work better.
- Many commented that moving to a PQA system would result in a better match between students and university courses. It was felt that this would help to reduce the rates of drop-out from university.

- For some who supported the proposals, the main reason was the benefits that it would bring for students specifically in creating a more positive student experience, empowering students, and supporting the widening participation agenda.

### **Disadvantaged groups (130 references)**

Many discussed the impact of reform on disadvantaged groups. While some felt that the proposed changes would be beneficial for this group, others did not concur. It was suggested that reform could promote social mobility by creating a system that is fairer and beneficial for disadvantaged groups due to the following:

- Better matching between students and courses.
- A view that predicted grades are often inaccurate.
- The difficulties for some groups to obtain grade predictions, for example, those in elective home education and FE.
- The view that reforms would support and encourage more aspirational choices.

Mainly due to contracted timescales, some respondents felt that the proposed reforms would generate greater levels of disadvantage. Issues discussed included:

- Reforms would negatively impact on the ability of schools and colleges and/or universities to provide support, information, and guidance (IAG).
- Students with complex needs and/or disabilities may not get sufficient support.
- Prospective students under PQA would be expected to make hurried decisions over the summer holiday period when support is minimal or unavailable to them.
- Perceptions that there would be more pressure around finding accommodation within a shorter timescale which would further disadvantage these groups, for example, in relation to finding suitable accommodation to meet their specific needs.
- HEPs will have less time in which to review, assess, and meet the needs of disadvantaged groups.

Some respondents considered that a move to PQA could result in universities introducing more university specific tests and requirements for applicants. It was felt this could disproportionately impact on disadvantaged groups who have reduced means or resources for taking part.

### **Predicted grades (129 references)**

There was extensive discussion of the current reliance on predicted grades as part of the admissions process. The main issues raised have been listed below:

- The accuracy of predicted grades was frequently mentioned. Many felt that these were often inaccurate and that there is now a need for review and reform.
- The view that students wasted time applying for inappropriate courses based on their predicted grades was expressed.
- The issue of 'over prediction' was discussed. It was felt that this contributes to greater inequality and generates high levels of stress.
- Predicted grades were seen to have a negative impact on disadvantaged groups.
- Where predicted grades resulted in unconditional offers, this had negative consequences, with students less motivated to study and having reduced choices.
- There was some discussion of pressure on school and college staff to inflate grades.
- A reliance on predicted grades (that were inaccurate), it was felt, resulted in greater demand on the Clearing system or poorer choices.
- Some respondents considered that even with PQA reforms, the prediction of grades would still be required or used. For example, teachers may set targets, or predicted grades might be included as part of the process of researching and considering suitable universities.

### **Disagreement with, or uncertainty about PQA reform (115 references)**

Responses coded under this theme included support for the current system as well as outlining reasons why PQA would not work. Alternatives were discussed including changes to the current system.

Comments about the effectiveness of the current system included the following:

- A view that the current system works well, and reform and changes would be unnecessary and disruptive. The current system was seen to be widely trusted and motivational for prospective students.
- Some respondents suggested that the proposed PQA models would not address some of the issues in the consultation document – equality, under or over predicting grades, mismatching, simplicity, and fairness.
- Responses outlined a concern that while the current system was ineffective, the shortcomings would not be resolved through either of the PQA models. Alternative models were proposed.

There was much discussion around the perceived drawbacks of a PQA model. The concerns around this included the following:

- Some drew on their experience of systems in other countries. The PQA systems in place in other countries, for example, Ireland and Australia were regarded as being poor, contributing to inequalities and negatively impacting on education.
- The current system, it was suggested, offers sufficient time for prospective students to prepare for university and to consider their options. This was made with specific reference to professional courses, for example, midwifery.
- Limited IAG resources in schools and colleges was discussed with specific reference to the limited timescale that would result from a PQA model and a need for support over the summer break.
- The view that the proposed PQA system would result in inequalities between different student groups, for example, mature, part-time, international students and domestic students on full-time courses.
- Some felt that PQA could not work without reform of the current exam system.
- A PQA system, it was felt, would not accommodate auditions, academic tests or interviews that require sufficient time to complete effectively.
- Some felt that a PQA system would not accommodate the need for students to carefully consider their options, visit universities, build their relationship with a university, and make an informed decision.
- It was suggested that a PQA system would not address the use of predicted grades as these would continue to be used as part of the process. As such the existing problems would remain or worsen.

Some responses coded under this theme expressed a more nuanced view, in which they discussed the pros and cons of the current system and the potential impact of PQA.

### **The impact of PQA timescales (113 references)**

The impact of a contracted timescale associated with the PQA model was discussed widely in responses to this question. Comments related both to timescales within the current admissions system and in relation to the proposed PQA models, specifically the compressed timescale. Some felt that under the current admissions system time was wasted due to the predicted results. As such, students could spend time applying to university courses that were unsuitable and inappropriate for them.

The impact of a contracted timescale resulting from PQA was regarded as a major disadvantage of the proposals. Many stated that there would be less time for the assessment and marking of exams and for the process of admission to university to take place.

Furthermore, it was outlined that due to the proposed PQA timescales there would be insufficient time for providing students with the appropriate support and IAG that they need. This would not be easily available to them over the summer period when schools and colleges are closed. A requirement to be available to offer this during the summer holiday would negatively impact on staffing and teacher recruitment.

Issues that were frequently mentioned in relation to the PQA proposals were:

- Insufficient time for students to choose, plan and research their applications and to put in place accommodation and finance.
- A shorter timeframe in which HEPs will need to plan, consider, and decide on the applications they receive.
- Limited time for HEPs to build relationships with students and to undertake institution specific admissions tests, auditions, or interviews.
- There would not be sufficient time for students with additional needs and/or disabilities to be assessed and catered for.
- PQA Model 2 was seen to be the better of the two proposals in terms of the timescale to accommodate preparation for admission by both students and HEPs and for meaningful engagement with applicants.
- The contracted timescale was regarded as disadvantageous for students who need support, information, and guidance in relation to their decision-making and making applications to HEPs.

### **Fairer and more informed decision-making (95 references)**

Fairness and decision-making were mentioned often in relation to the PQA models proposed. Responses coded to this theme discussed the greater fairness and transparency that they felt PQA would offer for prospective students. It was argued that PQA would create a simpler admissions process which would give students greater certainty, with HE choices being better matched to the applicant's proven ability. Furthermore, PQA would reduce the likelihood of HEP's 'gaming' the system.

However, some respondents noted that while they wanted to see a fairer system in place, they did not consider that PQA would necessarily deliver this primarily because it would not result in the equity sought by DfE.

### **Unconditional Offers (42 references)**

Discussion of unconditional offers centred around concerns about increased use of these, and the negative impact that they have on prospective students. They were regarded as inefficient and unfair. Issues discussed were:

- The impact of unconditional offers on motivation to study hard and to the best of a student's ability.
- Some comments were made on the current, more competitive, environment for HE providers, giving rise to them choosing to make 'conditional unconditional' offers. These were seen to be undesirable and a cause for concern leading to dropping out of HE and students being put under pressure to choose inappropriate or unsuitable courses.

In contrast to this, the HE stakeholder group outlined that unconditional offers can be beneficial for students and that other approaches or changes already in place could address concerns.

### **The impact on schools and colleges (41 references)**

The impacts of PQA on schools and colleges were discussed by some respondents. Discussion focused on the challenges for schools and colleges in accommodating the proposed timescales and the impact of this on staffing and resources. Some respondents stated that the school/college year would have to change to accommodate administration of exams.

There was frequent mention of the need for students to receive sufficient support and IAG during their preparation for HE admission. The main issues raised were the availability of staff to provide this over the summer break and the resources available to schools and colleges for IAG.

There was concern that proposed PQA reforms would negatively impact on the workload of school and college staff. In relation to this, recent pressures on schools and colleges were mentioned including the impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

PQA reforms, it was stated, could also result in increasing disadvantage. If schools and colleges were not able to provide sufficient support and IAG this would then fall to parents, or if provided over school holidays, would not be accessed by the most disadvantaged groups.

## Other comments

Some general and cautionary statements made by respondents included:

- That any PQA system should not result in more barriers for applicants.
- A PQA system may unintentionally create an environment in which undesirable admissions practices take place.
- That the importance of interviews, personal statements, and auditions as part of the HE admissions process should not be overlooked.

Other issues raised included:

- A recommendation that the government should invest in IAG that is of high quality across the country, that is impartial, and that is available across the year.
- While many acknowledged that international students are out of scope, concerns were raised about the impact on this group of applicants, and it was stressed that the needs of this group should be considered.
- Concerns about the impact on Scottish applicants where a different school system is in place.

Alternative reforms suggested included:

- Re-introducing AS Levels.
- For HE providers (particularly the most selective) to hold a proportion of their place for widening participation students.
- As an alternative the Post-Qualification Decision (PQD) model (where applicants apply and receive offers in line with the current approach but accept them after they have received their results).
- Greater use of technology during the admissions process.
- Placing a ban on unconditional offers.
- Regulation of support and IAG in schools and colleges.
- A request for further details regarding the proposed PQA reforms.
- Greater integration of contextual data into admissions decision-making and A level/Level 3 awarding.

## Stakeholders

The 'HE' group were generally supportive of some form of change (although a sub-group stated their opposition to any change). However, many also outlined their opposition to the

PQA proposals (Model 1 and Model 2). Many felt that the proposed changes would not meet the reasons for change as set out in the consultation document.

Except for the 'Other organisations' group where mixed views were expressed, the other stakeholder groups were more positive about the proposed changes and more supportive of the PQA proposals. The predominant view was that reform would result in a better, fairer, and simpler system (primarily due to removing predicted grades).

### **Alternative models proposed by consultation respondents**

Across all sections of the online consultation and the email responses, alternative models and approaches to admissions reform were proposed. In this section, those most consistently proposed have been outlined and, where available, references included. On this basis, four alternative models were identified (all from the HE stakeholder group), although some respondents described variations within these four alternatives.

Some respondents outlined proposals for alternatives or adaptations to Model 1 and Model 2. Some of these were very similar to the proposed models but were described by respondents when asked about alternatives. The 'student-centred' and UCAS models were most frequently mentioned by respondents.

#### **(1). A 'student-centred' model (UCU)**

In this model, the **Level 3 exams would be taken earlier** in the school/college year (for example, Easter), **results day** would take place in **early Summer** and there would be a **later start** date for those entering HE (up to 2 weeks later than currently).

Features and perceived advantages of model:

- The compressed timetable for applications and admissions would be avoided, enabling better decision-making.
- Level 3 results would be known in advance of HE applications avoiding problems associated with predicted grades.
- Regarded as a more beneficial model for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds due to the reduced likelihood to achieve, or challenge, lower predicted grades.
- There would be less pressure on school and college staff, and HEP admissions teams, linked to an extended timetable (although some pointed out this would be over the summer holiday period).

- Additional and earlier IAG seen as essential under this model. The introduction of a 'study choice check' (in Year 13) for prospective students is recommended as part of this model.
- The period of time for exam marking would not be compressed.
- An 'expression of interest' could be submitted to HEPs in advance of results in January of the year of entry to HE.
- Reference: UCU PQA: how we can make it work: [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11479/PQAs-how-we-can-make-it-work-Apr-21/pdf/UCU\\_PQ\\_applications\\_report\\_Apr21.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11479/PQAs-how-we-can-make-it-work-Apr-21/pdf/UCU_PQ_applications_report_Apr21.pdf)

Some respondents agreed wholesale with the UCU approach. Others expressed their own perspective on aspects of the UCU model.

## **(2). Post-Qualification Offer making model (UCAS)**

This model proposed by UCAS would involve applicants researching their options along the current timescale, applications to HEPs would be submitted prior to the Level 3 exams, and after Level 3 results day HEPs would make their offers.

Features and perceived advantages of model:

- Prospective students have an opportunity to make informed decisions because their offers would come after their results.
- It offers a more simple and straightforward approach to HE applications and admissions because offers are made after results.
- Universities view applications upon submission by students so there is more opportunity for them to build a relationship with candidates.
- Disruption to students is minimised because they are not considering offers while preparing for, and undertaking, exams.
- This model addresses concerns around the use of predicted grades because offers are based on actual results.
- Reference: UCAS: Reimagining UK admissions (April 2021) [download \(ucas.com\)](#)

Some respondents agreed wholesale with the UCAS approach. Others expressed their own perspective on aspects of the UCAS model.

## **(3). Post-Qualification Decision (PQD) model**

This model would enable student decisions based on actual grades although offers would be based on predicted grades. Prospective students would be able to apply and receive

offers in line with the current timeline. However, offers from HEPs would then be accepted after Level 3 results day.

Features and perceived advantages of model:

- Improve practice as HEPs would not be able to make 'conditional-unconditional' offers.
- Those candidates who do not meet the entry requirements with their results would have sufficient time to make an alternative HEP choice.
- Interviews and auditions can be accommodated under this model.
- An HEP offer would be an incentive and motivator for working hard.
- Accommodates decision changes.

One further variant of this was bringing forward the results day to July, with implications for exam dates, assessment and school and college timetables.

### **Question 3: PQA Delivery and Implementation**

In the consultation document DfE ruled out a model of PQA where applications and offers take place from August, with HE terms starting between November and January, removing the need to change Level 3 results day. The rationale was largely associated with the considerable gap between the end of school/college and the start of university which could pose a challenge to students, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**If you think these issues should not rule out consideration of the model above, please explain why, providing supporting evidence where possible.**

Responses (n=262) to this statement are discussed below:

#### **Agreement – approaches would offer a better system (97 references)**

Respondents coded under this theme stated their agreement with the DfE position and reasons for ruling out the issues. Some stated their agreement but caveated this with concerns about the issues outlined. Many also provided comments and feedback on why they held a specific view (these have been included in the other codes for this question).

#### **Higher education academic timetables (62 references)**

While some responses outlined a view that a shorter first term at HEPs would be an improvement and in many instances better for students, others noted disadvantages for the HE sector and potentially negative impacts on learning and placements. Changing

academic timetables was seen to be better for HE providers and would offer the best means to accommodate PQA.

Others raised concerns about the compression of the academic year. This would be particularly challenging for certain courses, for example, medicine.

There was a perception that changing the higher education system to a form of post-qualification admissions would result in disruption for both schools/colleges and HE. Many raised concerns about the impact of such changes on the most disadvantaged groups and how such change would impact on the competitiveness of the HE sector in a global market.

### **International students (42 references)**

Reference was made to how reform might impact on international students. The main concerns raised were that:

- International students could have an advantage, due to graduating earlier.
- The needs of international students should not be considered above those from the UK.
- The impact of reform on recruitment and applications from international students, with the potential for a loss of income for HEPs.

### **The gap between the end of school/college term and HE (39 references)**

Responses included discussion of the gap between the end of the school and college term and the proposed start of HE. Much of this related to the compressed timescale, including insufficient time for sourcing accommodation and student finances alongside completing the admissions process. Some reference was also made to those HEPs that already have a January start date for specific courses, for example, midwifery and medicine.

### **Stakeholder groups**

There were no differences evident between the stakeholder groups. Across all groups there was discussion of the rationale set out in relation to this question - including both agreement and disagreement - and expression of other views about the PQA proposals.

When asked which aspects of the UCAS application system that they thought should be changed, university students said: The use of predicted grades to determine university offers (30%); accepting offers deadlines (15%); personal statements (15%). Seventeen percent said that they did not think any aspects should be changed.

When university students were asked why they thought aspects of the UCAS application system should be changed, many students repeated issues related to predicted grades

mentioned in the table above. A level and Level 3 students said it would create a fairer, more objective system and that it would provide more time to plan for applying and going to university. It is important to note a small group of students indicated that they benefitted from predicted grades higher than they achieved, enabling them to attain a place at a high tariff university, despite lower than expected exam performance.

When university students were asked why they thought it would be better to receive and accept their offer from universities after they got their achieved grades in the summer, they said they would have had better options and made better choices.

Those who said that their predicted grades affected which university and course they applied for were asked how they thought this affected them. The largest number of responses said they made pragmatic choices of course and/or university.

Other major responses included making poorer choices and/or not going to their preferred university. Some indicated that they benefitted from having high predicted grades, either to get into a better university or being more motivated in their studies, although others experienced pressure due to high predicted grades.

## 5 MODEL 1: POST-QUALIFICATION ADMISSIONS AND OFFERS

### Question 1: Views on this system being better than the current system, worse, or no significant improvement

Do you think this system would be better than the current system, worse, or of no significant improvement? In the text box below, you can refer to the potential costs, adverse effects, or implementation challenges of such a reform.

One-half (242/479 – 50%) of those who provided an answer indicated that Model 1 would be worse than the current system. Just over one-third (175/479 – 36%) indicated that it would be better, and 63/479 (13%) felt there would be no significant improvement.

The ‘HE’ group (82%), ‘Schools and FE’ (53%), and ‘Other organisations’ (42%) were most likely to consider that Model 1 would be worse than the current system. A majority of the ‘Students/student representatives’ (55%) and the ‘Individuals’ group (62%) considered that Model 1 would be better.

**Table 5.1: Model 1 worse, better, or no significant improvement than current system**

Group	Worse	Proportion of group %	Better	Proportion of group %	No improvement	sig.	Proportion of group %
HE (n=136)	111	82%	13	9.5%	12		9%
Schools & FE (n=131)	70	53%	42	32%	19		14.5%
Students and student reps (n=20)	5	25%	11	55%	4		20%
Individuals (n=160)	42	26%	99	62%	19		12%
Other organisations (n=33)	14	42%	10	30%	9		27%

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=479.

Additional text responses were provided by 423 of respondents. Mixed views were offered; while some set out the potential improvements and benefits of Model 1, others outlined negative impacts and drawbacks of this model. The main topics discussed were the provision of support and IAG for students; the timescales of Model 1; the admissions

process; and issues around incorporating entrance tests, interviews, or auditions within a compressed timescale.

Positive views on Model 1 considered it would be a fairer system and more equitable, causing less stress on students as they would know their Level 3 results prior to HE application. The removal of predicted grades should help students make more informed and better matched course choices. In addition, it may contribute to greater social mobility and higher student aspirations.

The main issues raised in response to this question – Model 1 were adverse effects, potential costs, and implementation changes:

### **Model 1 adverse effects**

Responses addressed areas of concern in relation to Model 1. The primary concerns were regarding:

#### **Impacts on schools/colleges and students:**

- Adverse effects for students were frequently mentioned. The compressed applications timescale would create pressure, and this would generate stress and raise levels of anxiety. Some stated that a compressed exam timetable could generate a higher number of errors in assessment and marking; this would compound student stress.
- Many felt that there would be a lack of support and IAG for applicants, specifically during the summer holidays. Under this scenario, there was felt to be a high risk students would not receive the support and guidance that was seen by many as vital for prospective students.
- The potential requirement for school and college staff to support applications in the summer holidays would be a burden, have an impact on staff terms and conditions, and result in an unacceptable increased workload for teachers/FE staff.

#### **Additional/bespoke application processes:**

- Seemingly insufficient time for the application process and specifically for HE interviews, assessments, or auditions to take place.
- There was some discussion of additional assessments required for specific courses (for example, health and medicine). Examples included DBS applications and occupational health assessments that must be completed in addition to other admission requirements. It was noted that these often take significant time to finalise. A six-week window could not accommodate these requirements.

## **Admissions processes:**

- A risk that HEPs may introduce additional entry tests. This could disadvantage some student groups.
- The 'HE' group discussed the impact of Model 1 on the contextual aspects of the admissions process. As such, grades are not the only consideration for HEPs when considering applications. An emphasis was placed on the importance of relationship building between prospective students and the HE institution. This, it was argued, requires an investment of time that would not be available under Model 1.
- For HEPs, there was a view that Model 1 would not provide sufficient management time to plan and resource timetables, anticipate course demand and to put in place the teaching requirements.

## **Model 1 potential costs**

Few respondents specifically discussed the potential costs associated with Model 1. However, where this was mentioned, it focused on the following:

- Costs required to recruit additional exam markers to complete all assessment and marking in time for an earlier results day.
- Additional school/college staff resourcing (to provide support and IAG and to cover this over the summer holidays), and HE staff resourcing (for recruitment of additional admissions staff for the process to be complete within the 6-week timescale).
- With reference to the risk of greater errors in exam marking within a compressed timetable, it was noted that costs would be associated with any legal challenges resulting from this.
- With reference to the implementation of Model 1, there would be costs associated with training staff (HE and schools/FE colleges) to ensure effective delivery of reform.

## **Model 1 implementation considerations**

A limited number of respondents discussed challenges associated with implementing reform. These included consideration of implementation of Model 1 and approaches that could contribute to a more efficient and timely process. The following areas were covered:

- The use of IT and new technologies to contribute to a more efficient application and admissions process. Some noted caution around this as it could exclude some applicants and may result in other aspects of the application process being

overlooked or result in a higher rate of errors. Examples included script scanners for exam marking and the use of online interviews and tests.

- PQA reform, it was noted, could provide an opportunity for the HE sector to review approaches to admissions that have been in place for a long time. This would offer an opportunity for innovation and consideration of different approaches.
- A view that implementation of reform (Model 1 in particular) should not be hurried. As such, an effective Model 1 operation would need to be implemented over a significant period of time to allow adjustment to a new approach.

## **Model 1 – Question 2: Bringing Level 3 results day forward to the end of July**

**Please provide your views on Level 3 results day being brought forward to the end of July, in order to provide time for students to apply to Higher Education, with their Level 3 results already known. What effect do you think this could have on students, teachers, schools and colleges and how best could this be facilitated?**

A range of views regarding the impact of moving Level 3 results day (to provide time for student to apply for HE with their Levels 3 results known) were discussed by respondents (n=443). Those supporting this change highlighted the benefits of reduced time waiting for results and more time for prospective students to make HE choices and submit applications. It was also stated that student anxiety and stress would be reduced because of this. Those opposed to this change highlighted concerns that it would not address the negative issues associated with a compressed timescale. Others felt that it would result in too much pressure on schools and colleges and their staff, and for students who may make more hurried and thus poorer decisions about their HE options. The main themes have been outlined below.

### **Impacts on schools and colleges (189 references)**

The impact of this change on schools and colleges was widely discussed and, for some, regarded as significant and an area of concern requiring careful consideration.

The anticipated disruption that would accompany this change, would bring negative consequences for those already disadvantaged. Comparisons were made with the disruption associated with COVID-19.

Some outlined concerns about this change on the curriculum and associated compressed teaching time, further adding to the pressures for teaching staff. There was a perception that schools and colleges would need to employ additional staff to provide advice to students after they have received their Level 3 results.

Respondents offered suggestions regarding how best to facilitate bringing Level 3 results day forward to the end of July, including:

- Amending term dates, including matching the school/college terms to those of HEPs.
- Shortening the Easter holiday, for example, to one week.
- Moving A level or equivalent Level 3 exams to earlier in the school/college year. Schools and colleges, it was felt, would need additional resource and/or careers advisers to enable them to provide IAG, particularly during the summer break.

Others flagged that preparation for applications and IAG from schools and colleges would need to be available across the year and in advance of exams. Some considered this would result in teachers providing predicted grades as part of their support for students.

### **Support and guidance for prospective students (141 references)**

In terms of support and guidance, responses discussed were as follows:

- There was consensus across responses that, under this model, support would need to be available during the summer break.
- Some respondents outlined that schools and colleges which are more able to offer support and IAG to pupils would be at an advantage. Not all schools and colleges would be able to offer this during the summer break. In such cases there would be a greater reliance on parents – not all of whom would be able to provide the required support.
- Students would be required to manage the time between results day and starting HE carefully. Applicants could have jobs, volunteering placements or holidays and visits to HEPs to juggle.
- Applicants would need to organise accommodation and finances in tandem over the summer break. A risk was flagged pertaining to students, particularly disadvantaged, who must work over this time and/or need to be encouraged and motivated to apply to university.
- Support provided by the HE sector for students (for example, peer support) may not be available over the summer where previously it was provided during term time.
- Comments were made regarding fewer resources being available to students over the summer break. It was noted that some students do not have access to IT at home and so may struggle to complete online applications and processes.

## **Impact on the exam board and the exam timescale (97 references)**

In terms of managing the resulting timescale for exams, due to bringing Level 3 results day forward, responses discussed were as follows:

- That it would be difficult to accommodate teachers who are also involved in exam marking.
- That there would be insufficient time for the exam appeals process.
- Some felt that a compressed marking period might result in a lowering of quality and/or reliability.
- A few discussed the appeals process and noted that this would have to be more rapid.
- Greater pressure around meeting an earlier Level 3 results day had the potential to impact negatively on examiner recruitment.
- Others had concerns about the pressure that might be put on the Level 3 curriculum. These centred around a view that this would be narrowed or that some of the subject specific or course content could be reduced.
- A concern was expressed that if results day was moved forward, this would result in exams moving as well. Subsequently, teaching time would have to be condensed and thus potentially compromised.

## **Other comments**

Other areas addressed in the responses included:

- With regards to UK nations, it was felt that moving results day would have less impact in Scotland where this already takes place earlier. The need for alignment across all nations of the UK was also stressed.
- The potential impact of changes on international applicants and on the competitiveness of UK universities.
- If Model 1 was implemented, it was felt that the UCAS form, references and personal statement should be submitted at an earlier time. This would reduce pressures over the summer holidays.
- The focus should not solely be on Level 3 results, it was noted that GCSE results are also within the scope of HE.

## Stakeholders

The 'HE' and 'Other organisations' groups were more likely to discuss their concerns in relation to the impact on time for interview or assessments, processing applications and provision of IAG (this would remain even if Level 3 results day was brought forward to the end of July). Compared to the 'Schools and FE' group they were slightly more likely to be positive about this change.

The 'Schools and FE' group provided a lot of discussion around the impact of this change on the summer break and their concerns about pressures on teaching staff and exam boards that would result from it.

In contrast to the 'Schools and FE' group and to some extent the 'HE' and 'Other' group, parents and young people were much more supportive of bringing Level 3 results day forward. It was seen beneficial for students.

## Model 1- Question 3: Applicant support, how this could be offered, and student preparation in advance of Level 3 results

**Please provide your views on the support applicants will need to make their applications to HE under this model, and do you have views on when and how this could be offered? How could students best prepare their application for HE before they receive their Level 3 (A level and equivalent) results? – Please explain. This can include reference to support for researching and completing applications, deciding which offers to accept, and support put in place before they start HE. It could also refer to ensuring that all applications are treated fairly by HE providers.**

Respondents to the consultation were invited to share their view on the support requirements for students applying to HE under Model 1. This question was focused on when and how such support could be offered, and how students might prepare their application prior to receiving their Level 3 (or similar) results. There were 429 text responses to this question. Responses were primarily focused on discussion of IAG availability and timing, the impact of Model 1 timescales on support, comments on the HE applications and admissions process, and the potential impact on schools and colleges and school/college staff.

## IAG – provisions and improvements (217 references)

While some respondents considered that current support needs would not need to be changed, a much larger group considered that current IAG provision would be inadequate under a PQA system. Responses discussed were as follows:

- There were concerns as to how student support needs could be met to ensure that prospective students have the right information for making informed choices. It was

also felt that levels of support would vary depending on the outcome for individuals. For example, those who did not do as well in their exams as anticipated and who would therefore require additional advice in making alternative choices.

- Many responses outlined that prospective students need a lot of encouragement and support to progress their application to an HEP. To address this, it was proposed that research and preparation could take place in advance of exams and/or results – for example, during the spring term of the last Level 3 year of study. On this basis, HE applications (the UCAS form) would have been prepared in advance of results along with personal statements and teacher references.
- Providing a substantial proportion of IAG prior to Level 3 results would lower the requirement for, or intensity of, support post-results day.
- Others expressed concern about only extremely limited support being available after results day (and during the summer break). This would be particularly problematic for specific courses where more bespoke support is required in relation to specialist auditions and interviews (for example, medicine and application to conservatoires).

Some respondents considered that schools and colleges were best placed to provide advice and one to one support as this would support sustained positive relationships with students. Model 1 was regarded as an impediment to peer support for students as this would not be as readily available over the summer period and post results. Such support, it was noted, is vital for social mobility. Some views on the most effective approach to providing support and its focus were outlined. Views expressed covered the following areas:

- IAG starting at a much earlier stage (from primary school onwards).
- An IAG programme that is delivered over many years and on a timely basis.
- Outreach provision from HEPs (post-16).
- Content that is generated by both educators and employers.
- Personalised IAG made available to all young people.
- Outreach that is specifically focused on the widening participation group.

Respondents proposed improvements and innovation that, in their view, would offer improved support provision to prospective students. These addressed resources and delivery issues and included the following suggestions:

- A national online module to support informed choices (and independent of the HE sectors).
- Schools/colleges appointing one member of staff with responsibility for IAG.

- Promoting and maximising the use of the UCAS website, and the creation of a well-resourced UCAS hub.
- The provision of a dedicated national support service alongside the implementation of PQA.
- National investment and funding for IAG in schools and communities.
- Enhanced partnerships between schools/colleges and the HE sector for IAG provision.
- Additional tutoring support – delivered in response to time lost due to COVID-19 – being used as a basis for stronger IAG in schools and colleges.
- Learning from other countries, for example, The Study Choice Check (the Netherlands) that evaluates the ‘fit’ between a student and their course choices.
- The use of targeted support, for example, the Uni Connect programme.
- The introduction of minimum standards for IAG, for example, ensuring that IAG meets the Gatsby Foundation benchmarks.

### **The applications and admissions process (128 references)**

Many comments were made about the applications and admissions process for HE. Some respondents outlined how, in their view, Model 1 would make these processes easier, primarily because students could be applying to fewer courses. Others expressed concerns about the impact of Model 1 timescales.

Concerns were raised that under PQA Model 1, system operation would be like the current Clearing system. As such, it would operate on a ‘first come first served’ basis, resulting in applicants feeling under pressure to make a quick decision on an offered university place because, if they failed to do so, it may be allocated to someone else.

Further to this view, it was outlined that under Model 1 the most competitive and selective courses could be filled up with pre-qualified applicants (unless this was prevented). There would be no guarantees that a specific HE course will be available to the student in the absence of a conditional offer.

The principal areas of discussion and suggestions for change to the process of application and/or admission have been outlined below:

- Much of the application form content such as personal statements and references could be completed in advance of Level 3 exams. This could be based on a considered list of HEP choices.
- Some respondents felt that the value of personal statements warranted consideration.

- Schools and colleges could still provide predicted/projected grades to be used as a guide for the application process.
- HEP open days could be held in advance of Level 3 exams (applicants would need to have identified HEP choices at this stage).
- A move to January HEP applications was proposed by some respondents.
- Applicants could make an 'expression of interest' to their chosen HEP before results day (as in the model proposed by UCU).
- Some felt that a form of pre-application would still be required, particularly for specific courses, for example, engineering.

### **Timescales – impact on support and applications (103 references)**

In addition to statements about the need for support to be provided at an earlier point in the academic year (as discussed above), respondents discussed the best time for support and IAG relating to HE to commence. While the starting point for this did vary, most felt that support from Year 11 onwards would be the most appropriate. This would offer space and time for prospective students to reflect on and consider their options, and in this way would support more informed decision-making. Specific responses setting out how support could be provided across the years of Level 3 study were given.

Under Model 1, many respondents considered that there would be insufficient time to put effective support in place for prospective students and that this would result in rushed and pressured decision-making. Furthermore, if support took place earlier it could potentially conflict with exam study and preparation. A few stated that having results day in August, would ensure that more time was available for making informed choices.

There was some discussion around the best time for visits to HEPs to take place under Model 1. There was scope it was stated for these to take place after the Level 3 exams had been completed and before results day.

### **Impacts on schools and colleges (97 references)**

While some respondents stated that teachers are best placed to offer support, the expectation that this should take place during the school and college holidays was widely regarded to be unfair. The capacity of schools and colleges to provide sufficient levels of support was also discussed. This would be more challenging when a cohort of young people is large.

Further to this, it was outlined that additional resources would be required if there was an expectation that schools and colleges would provide support over the summer holidays. The consensus was that teachers could not be expected to miss all or part of their summer

break. If this were the case, it was highlighted that there would be implications for their terms and conditions. Solutions proposed included the recruitment of existing school/college staff to provide the additional time required over the summer, or the recruitment of external trained and qualified career advisers to provide post-results support. Respondents expressed a view that private schools and would be at an advantage in relation to resources and capacity for support provision.

## **Stakeholders**

Across the different stakeholder groups the areas of discussion in relation to this question were similar. Those in the 'Schools and FE' group provided more feedback on the need for IAG and support for application to take place sooner (including in Years 11 and 12), but this was also a topic of discussion for all the groups.

## **Other issues and areas of discussion**

Fewer comments were made in relation to other considerations for the provision of support and application process under Model 1. These are outlined below:

- There would be disadvantages for mature students who will be less aware of the admissions process, and often have other responsibilities, for example, childcare over the summer.
- Prospective students from the most disadvantaged group will be less able to access support over the summer holidays and less likely to have the time (due to a need to work), parental support and/or IT access required.
- Those with learning disabilities who need specialist and additional support may be unable to access this during the summer break or complete applications within the contracted timescale.

## **Model 1 – Question 4: Additional factors that should be considered.**

**Do you have views on any additional factors that should be considered in relation to potential effects on disadvantaged groups, and students with disabilities, mental health issues or other special needs?**

Respondents to the consultation were invited to share their views on additional factors that should be considered with reference to Model 1. This was specifically in relation to the potential effects it might have on disadvantaged students, those with disabilities, those with mental health issues or students with special needs. A total of 352 text responses were provided for this question.

Discussion centred around the extent to which the Model 1 proposals were beneficial or not for these groups of students. Overall, the balance of views showed a larger proportion of respondents considered that Model 1 was not beneficial for these groups. Other discussion focused on the impact of the Model 1 compressed timescales on these groups and the provision of support and guidance. Some new or alternative approaches were also proposed.

### **The disadvantages and benefits of Model 1**

Those who considered that Model 1 would not be beneficial for prospective students from widening participation groups outlined their reasons for this view. This included the following:

- Those from more affluent backgrounds would be likely to have a greater level of support from parents and family than those from more deprived backgrounds.
- Because of additional needs, prospective students from these groups require more time and accommodation of their situation. It was considered that Model 1 does not allow for this.
- There was a perception that Model 1 would generate higher levels of stress and anxiety than the current system and as such would have a negative impact on these groups.
- Some groups, it was suggested, may have to seek employment before commencing HE due to their circumstances (for example, care leavers). This would compromise their ability and availability to make informed choices and may negatively impact their motivation to apply.

A smaller proportion of respondents outlined that Model 1 would be beneficial for those with additional needs. The main reasons for this were a perception that Model 1 offers a fairer system, and that removing predicted grades would be beneficial for mental health and contribute to reduced levels of stress and anxiety.

### **The Model 1 compressed timescale (102 references)**

The compressed timescale associated with Model 1 was widely discussed in relation to groups with additional needs:

- In general, it was considered that there would be less time for submission of information on extenuating circumstances resulting in additional barriers, for example, poorer assessments of need.

- Similarly, it was felt Model 1 would not provide sufficient time for HEPs to liaise with those with additional needs and to put in place reasonable adjustments in advance of the start of the HE term. For example, this might be adapted accommodation for a student with physical disabilities.
- Many discussed the need for contextual factors to be considered as part of the application process. The time available for adequate consideration of these was seen as limited under Model 1.
- The need for students with additional needs to have time to consider, understand and reflect on their HE choices was seen as more limited under Model 1 and it was felt that poor choices would be likely.

### **Support and guidance (63 references)**

As mentioned under other questions, the contracted timescale and the requirement for support over the summer break in Model 1 was widely felt to negatively impact on the provision of support and guidance. It was noted that this would have a disproportionate impact on the most disadvantaged who would need much higher levels of support for a move into HE.

### **New and alternative approaches (59 references)**

As part of their response to this question suggestions for new and/or alternative approaches to supporting those with additional needs were outlined. These suggestions included the following:

- The provision of extra financial assistance offered to prospective students with additional needs.
- Providing dedicated mentors who will offer tailored support to this group.
- Removing the personal statement requirement – this was seen as not helpful to those with additional needs.
- Allowing HE applications to be started before results day. Thus, extending the window over which IAG is provided and allowing those with additional needs extra time for decision-making and applying.
- The introduction of a ‘national contextual offer’ that reduces the grades required by those facing the most disadvantage.
- Designated HEP staff offering specialist advice, informal visits, and summer schools to this group.
- A summer holiday admissions workshop.

## Stakeholders

Responses to this question did not show any difference between the five stakeholder groups. Similar and consistent issues were discussed by respondents from all the groups.

### **Model 1- Question 5: Accommodating entry tests, auditions, and interviews**

**Please provide your views on how additional entry tests, auditions and interviews could be accommodated under this model.**

A total of 401 text responses were provided. These outlined a range of views on how additional entry tests, auditions and interviews could be accommodated under Model 1. A substantial proportion of respondents indicated that, in their view, it was not possible to accommodate these within Model 1. Key issues related to timings for entry tests, auditions and interviews, and the resulting impact on students. The impact of the Model 1 timescale was a cross cutting theme and has been addressed in the responses across all Model 1 questions. Many felt that accommodating these additional requirements was the most challenging aspect of Model 1.

#### **These cannot be accommodated under Model 1 (161 references)**

Many stated that the six weeks between results and HE start could not accommodate these additional requirements. University staff would not be available over the summer – with many on holiday – so interviews could not be accommodated.

Students often engaged in other activities over summer, so many stated that they would be less available e.g., working, volunteering, or travelling. This would be particularly difficult for students applying to some courses (e.g., nursing, physiotherapy, music, art, and medicine) as assessments, auditions, portfolio assessments, and interviews need to be accommodated as part of the application process. With these courses, student cohorts are expected to participate in an interview, assessment or audition, and 6 weeks was seen as too little time. It was felt that the compressed timescale would compromise the process and its quality.

Others stated that courses that require a DBS check would need a longer timescale or that student finance arrangements and health screenings cannot easily be accommodated. Pressure on time could result in some institutions creating their own applications window at an earlier time to accommodate interviews. This was seen to undermine the intentions of PQA and Model 1 and could create an unintentional two-tiered process.

### **These can be accommodated under Model 1 (35 references)**

A small proportion of respondents considered that these requirements could be successfully accommodated under Model 1. Conducting interviews, auditions and tests at any time was considered feasible, for example, this could be in advance of the exam results but further to registering an interest in the course. Others stated that no change from the present approach would be required and they could go ahead at the same time, even if some were not progressed. Under Model 1 it was noted that students would make fewer course choices and this would translate into fewer interviews being required. On this basis they could be accommodated.

### **The impact on students (73 references)**

The requirement for schools and colleges to provide support in relation to entry tests, interviews and auditions would remain under Model 1. Some respondents stated that the availability of staff to provide test interviews and support preparation would be compromised by the contracted timescale.

### **Other approaches suggested (92 references)**

Respondents proposed some solutions to accommodating interviews, tests, and auditions into the shorter Model 1 timeframe. These included the following:

- A move towards greater use of technology e.g., online tests or interviews.
- Greater standardisation of entry tests across HEPs.
- A centralised entry test system e.g., for entry into medicine.
- Sitting entry tests or participating in interviews before results day.
- Removing interviews from some courses – as under PQA the applicants are more qualified.
- The introduction of rapid interview days.

### **Stakeholders**

While all the stakeholder groups discussed the difficulties and challenges around accommodating tests, auditions, or interviews, the HE group were more likely to outline reasons why they could not be accommodated or would be extremely difficult to accommodate. The 'Schools and FE' group provided greater commentary on alternative approaches or timing for these to take place.

## Model 1- Question 6: Implications for the way in which students apply.

**Under this model, would you expect there to be implications for the way in which students apply, which for most undergraduate students is currently through a centralised admissions service (UCAS) rather than directly to higher education providers?**

Under the current system most undergraduate students apply through a centralised admissions service (UCAS) instead of applying directly to HEPs. Ninety-four percent (462 of 491) replied to this question. Of this group more than two-fifths (41%) stated 'yes' that there are implications, while just over one-third (36%) said 'no' and nearly one-quarter (23%) were unsure.

**Table 5.2: Implications for the way in which students apply through a centralised admissions service (UCAS) rather than directly to Higher Education providers.**

Response Breakdown	Number	Proportion of group %
Yes	190	41%
No	165	36%
Not sure	107	23%

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=462.

When considered by stakeholder, the 'HE' group were most likely to state 'yes' (74%) and 'Individuals' and 'Schools and FE' were most likely to state 'no' (45.7% and 47% respectively).

**Table 5.3: Implications for the way in which students apply through a centralised admissions service (UCAS) rather than directly to Higher Education providers by stakeholder group.**

Stakeholder group	Yes	Proportion of group %	No	Proportion of group %	Not sure	Proportion of group %
Higher Education	100	74%	19	14%	16	12%
Schools and FE	31	24%	60	47%	37	29%
Students and student representatives	4	21%	9	47%	6	32%
Individuals (other)	44	29%	70	46%	39	25%
Other organisations	11	42%	6	23%	9	35%

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=462.

Respondents who stated ‘yes’ were asked to share their views regarding the implications for this process under PQA Model 1. A total of 266 text responses were given to this question. The implications discussed mainly related to the use and acceptability of UCAS, discussion relating to direct applications to HEPs, and comments about the likely impacts on students.

### **The use and acceptability of UCAS (108 references)**

A centralised system was associated with fairness, regarded as easier for students to use and seen to be more transparent, a factor considered to be better for the most disadvantaged groups. Overall, there was strong support for retaining UCAS with most of the comments indicating a positive view.

While some respondents praised the UCAS system and considered it effective, others felt that it was ‘not fit for purpose’. Those in favour considered that a centralised system would be crucial within the compressed timeframe of Model 1.

Under Model 1, some respondents stated that UCAS may be unable to cope with the levels of demand and that students might prefer direct applications that would offer a quicker route. Any fragmentation of the centralised system was generally opposed. For example, there were concerns about HEPs choosing not to use UCAS and thus creating an unregulated application process. Some improvements to the UCAS system were proposed including:

- The use of a more straightforward and simplified UCAS form.

- Clear deadlines regarding applications.
- Fundamental changes to create a more efficient UCAS system.
- Use of an 'UCAS Extra' approach.
- Better funding and enhanced staffing of UCAS.
- Use of a clearing system.
- Putting limits on the number of simultaneous applications.

### **Direct applications (108 references)**

Under Model 1, there were comments regarding a possible move to more direct applications and an associated reduction in the need for the centralised UCAS system. It was noted that direct systems are already in place e.g., Unifrog. Those supporting direct applications felt that:

- It would offer a cheaper process.
- Prospective students may be only considering one HEP, so have less need of UCAS.
- Direct applications are more efficient and less labour intensive.
- There is a likelihood that individual institutions would choose to opt out from a centralised application process (such as in Model 1).
- Direct applications would give HEPs more control over their recruitment.
- It would be better for smaller institutions.
- Student seeking an earlier response will prefer a direct application.
- It would offer a single system for both domestic and international students.

However, concerns were expressed about the potential unfairness of direct applications. It was stated that they would result in greater inequalities, less transparency, and limited data sharing. Furthermore, HEPs could resort to more aggressive marketing approaches and the most selective institutions would be more likely to use direct applications.

### **The impacts on students (68 references)**

Some responses expressed views about the potential impacts on students. Some thought it could mean that students would not feel ready or prepared for HE and result in a higher number choosing to take a 'gap year'. Model 1, it was stated, would create more barriers for applicants and have a negative impact on those in the most disadvantaged groups.

Some of the comments related to potential benefits for students applying with direct applications. It was suggested that with direct applications, students would be more in control of the process (compared to the current system using UCAS). Some felt that those who had taken the International Baccalaureate (IB) would be at an advantage because they would have their results earlier. This they believed might result in schools choosing to use the IB to give their students an advantage.

### Other issues

Concerns about an increasing level of competition for HE courses and providers, unconditional offers being made prior to results day, and the centralised system being unable to cope with a large demand in the compressed timescale were flagged.

### Stakeholders

The ‘School and FE’ and ‘Individuals’ groups outlined a view that UCAS or a centralised system should continue more often than the other groups. The ‘HE’ group were least likely to discuss their support for UCAS or a centralised admissions system. Amongst this group there was extensive commentary on direct applications resulting from a change to PQA Model 1. HEPs, it was felt, would circumvent a centralised system.

## Model 1 – Question 7: Limits on the number of courses applied for

### Should there be limits on how many courses they (students) can apply for?

This question had 464 responses (95% of all respondents). Of this group, more than three-quarters (77%) stated that ‘yes’ there should be limits, and only 10% stated ‘no’.

**Table 5.4: Responses regarding limits on courses applied for**

Answer	Number	Proportion of group %
Yes	357	77%
No	48	10%
Not sure	59	13%

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=464.

A majority of all the stakeholder group were in favour of course limits. The ‘HE’ and ‘Schools and FE’ groups had higher proportions that stated ‘yes’ (85% and 80% of the group respectively).

**Table 5.5: Responses regarding limits on courses applied for by stakeholder group**

Stakeholder group	Yes	Proportion of group %	No	Proportion of group %	Not sure	Proportion of group %
Higher Education	116	85%	8	6%	12	9%
Schools and FE	103	80%	10	8%	15	12%
Students and student representatives	9	47%	6	32%	4	21%
Individuals (other)	113	73%	21	14%	21	14%
Other organisations	15	60%	3	12%	7	28%

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=464.

Respondents were asked for their views on what the course number and limit each applicant should be able to apply for under Model 1. A total of 371 text responses were given for this question – many of which suggested specific limits on the number of courses. Further discussion related to potential impacts on HEP management and resources, and student decision-making.

### **Suggested course limits (146 references)**

A range of different course limits were proposed by respondents – from 2 up to 10 courses. The balance across all responses was for a limit at the same or lower than the current system (5 course applications). Where reasons were given for the suggested number:

Reasons for the same or lower limits:

- If results are known there is more certainty and as such limits should be lowered.
- There is a risk that applicants will become overloaded.
- Fewer HEP visits will be required if there is a limit.
- This would be better for applicants within the compressed Model 1 timeframe.
- This would be more realistic and manage applicant expectations.
- The level of work for HEP admissions teams would be reduced.

Reasons for higher limits (more than 5 courses):

- This would be appropriate for specific courses e.g., medicine.
- It would offer a greater range of options to students.
- Applicants would be able to compare across a wider range of courses.
- If an applicant is unsuccessful, they will be able to consider alternatives.
- It would reduce the ‘undermatching’ of disadvantaged students.
- It would contribute to raising expectations and aspirations.
- There are no limits in other countries e.g., the USA.

### **The impact on planning and management (114 references)**

Many comments were made about the impact of course limits on HEP planning and management. These mainly related to how higher limits would impact on the administration and admissions processes in institutions. HEPs, it was stated, need to plan and to understand how many applicants are likely to apply for a given course. If the course limits were high, it would result in poor use of admission staff time and HEP resources.

Many courses, it was noted, have a limit on the number of places available. This would limit applications. If there were not limits on the number of courses, this would place a burden on HEPs and result in high levels of rejections.

### **Student decision-making (156 references)**

Many respondents viewed that higher or unlimited course applications would negatively impact student decision-making by:

- Generating uncertainty and therefore anxiety among applicants.
- Arguably removing an applicant’s motivation to research appropriate courses, as removing lower limits risks the need to make fewer considered choices.
- If decision-making was taking place after results day, this could result in rushed and poor choices. A larger number of choices, it was argued, could result in confusion and the making of speculative applications.
- Unlimited course choices could be unmanageable, particularly for those with additional needs who may be overwhelmed. This would compromise their decision-making. If limits are set, it was argued that the contextual aspects of an application would be effectively accommodated (of particular importance for those with additional needs).

## Other comments

Others regarded the current limit of five courses as effective, adequate, and realistic. Some found it necessary for forecasting, planning and capacity of HEP admissions teams. This was seen as fair to students and as offering them the right level of choice. Some respondents suggested a rolling number that would accommodate other choices if earlier ones were unsuccessful (a 'UCAS Extra' system), ranking of course choices, or a secondary process that matched unplaced students to other unfilled courses (although it was noted this would be difficult to accommodate in the short timeframe).

## Question 7: How quickly applications can be processed under Model 1

**If you are a higher education provider, we would be interested in your views of how quickly applications could be processed under this model.**

The 'HE' group of respondents were invited to comment on how quickly, in their view, applications can be processed under Model 1. A total of 119 HE respondents provided feedback and 43 respondents from other groups also outlined their views. Responses related to two main areas: the task of processing and dealing with large volumes of applications, and the impacts of the Model 1 compressed timescale on the processing of applications.

### Processing and dealing with applications (109 references)

The view was expressed that HEPs should be able to undertake the required processing of applications under Model 1, for example, it was suggested that they already do this effectively under the current Clearing system.

It was noted that if results are already known then the processing of applications would be quicker. However, the more complex applications may not be so easily accommodated. One HEP outlined the challenges associated with processing large volumes of applications. Key challenges for accommodating processing would be dealing with specialist courses e.g., medicine where interviews are mandatory, and where the requirement for a personal statement is retained.

Other challenges outlined by respondents included:

- Harder for smaller providers to deal with large volumes of applicants.
- Students who are slow to complete their application will be less likely to be followed up.
- Concerns related to the anticipated number of 18-year-olds in future years.
- Applications may be considered in a narrower way than previously.

- Fitting in all the checks, assessments and interviews required.
- Uncertainty about the number of applications would create a barrier.
- A risk that the quality of assessment of applications would be compromised.
- Time taken to chase missing information on application forms.

Suggested solutions included:

- Greater use of technology and automation for processing applications.
- Appointment of additional admissions staff.
- Limits on numbers of courses applicants can apply for would promote greater efficiency.

### **Impacts of the Model 1 timescale (100 references)**

Responses coded under this theme mainly outlined the view that the 6 weeks available under Model 1 would not offer sufficient time for the processing of applications. It was noted that time currently taken (under the present system) for processing applications ranges from 6 to 11 months.

Many of those who responded set out the time frame in which they considered applications could be processed. This ranged from 6+ weeks to 5 months. Twelve weeks was frequently mentioned. The six-week time frame would only be feasible if no interviews or other checks/assessments were required.

Time taken for processing would be dependent upon other factors such as the complexity of applications, the completeness of applications and the staff resource available. In relation to this it was noted that the task of processing applications requires skills and training which would take some time to complete.

### **Other comments**

The need for clear deadlines and rules around offer-making were regarded as essential in ensuring a fair system under Model 1.

A few respondents noted that they would be able to make a more informed judgement if more detail regarding Model 1 was available. It was stated that places would only be able to be kept open for a limited period e.g., 2 weeks, and that any appeals would need to be resolved quickly.

## **Model 1 – Question 9: Additional implications**

**Please provide your views on any additional implications under this model for students, higher education providers and courses not already covered above.**

The consultation form asked respondents to outline any additional implications under Model 1 for: students, HE providers, and HE courses. 205 responses were given, of which a large proportion were individual views on the PQA proposals and their impact. Many of the responses also addressed the impact of Model 1 on HEPs and students. The reporting below is based solely on additional areas that were identified. As such, where respondents shared views already outlined under other Model 1 questions (and reported under previous questions), these have not been included.

### **PQA proposals and their impacts (100 references)**

Additional suggestions in relation to the PQA proposals included:

- Before implementing PQA, a recommendation that international approaches are reviewed and considered. The UK, it was suggested, can learn from the experiences of other countries e.g., Australia and Germany.
- PQA represents a significant change to the current system. As such it was seen as important that change processes and implementation are effectively planned and well-managed.
- The DfE should consider a PR/marketing campaign to promote a new PQA system.
- The suggestion that the use of continuous assessment as part of grading and benchmark grades would be helpful under Model 1.
- There was a call for greater transparency from HEPs regarding their decision-making and course acceptances.
- PQA, it was noted, will have a UK-wide impact. Therefore, all countries of the UK should be within scope. Systems are different (e.g., in Scotland) and impacts of any changes need to be carefully considered.
- There was some concern about the potential 'knock on' impact for professional key workers (e.g., NHS staffing), if professional programmes are required to start later.

## **Impact of Model 1 on students (66 references)**

Potential additional impacts on students raised included:

- Concerns regarding student accommodation. The time for applying would be shorter and landlords may accommodate those in Years 2 or 3 of university above those entering Year 1.
- Some respondents felt that there was a lack of clarity regarding how pre-qualified students would apply under Model 1. For example, this may be prospective students who took a year out after completing their Level 3 exams.
- Student finance was mentioned. It was felt that this was an area that has been overlooked. The compressed timescale for Model 1 would put pressure on the system of student finance and there would be less time for applying.
- Some respondents felt that under Model 1 students would have less opportunity to participate in summer activities. As such they may not have time to attend and would lose out. Examples provided included summer schools.
- That Model 1 could result in students applying for oversubscribed courses (as their results may meet or exceed the entry requirements for these courses). In such cases decision-making may be rushed and ill-considered. This could be counterproductive for the recruitment of committed students who are well matched to their course. This would be negative for both the student and the HEP.
- Some respondents felt that the motivational effect of receiving offers in advance of Level 3 exams would be lost under Model 1.
- It was noted that Model 1 could impact on student placements if changes were made to the start date of HE courses. Time for placements would be reduced to the detriment of student and course providers.

## **Impacts of Model 1 on HEPs (48 references)**

Additional impacts on HEPs were outlined in responses. Some respondents outlined that there would be significant financial consequences for HEPs. To meet the requirement for a more rapid applications process they would need to invest in technology alongside higher and more sustained levels of marketing. Furthermore, they would not have any certainty regarding their likely income.

A view that recruitment of international students would be negatively impacted was frequently raised. Any reduction in recruitment levels and/or interest in attending a UK institution could result in much fewer international students choosing to study in this

country. This would have a very negative effect on the international competitiveness of the UK's HE sector.

### **Stakeholders**

While all the stakeholder groups offered feedback on challenges and considerations for the PQA Model 1 system, those in the 'HE' group provided more negative responses and included greater detail. The 'HE' group set out and re-iterated their reasons for opposition to a greater extent and made frequent reference to concerns about the compressed timescale and the impact on the widening participation agenda. Some of this group outlined that, in their view, further analysis, consultation and research on Model 1 is required.

### **Emailed responses**

Those who responded by email were generally critical of Model 1; in particular, that timescales were compressed and that it did not allow enough time for IAG support for students.

## 6 MODEL 2: PRE-QUALIFICATION APPLICATIONS WITH POST-QUALIFICATION OFFERS AND DECISIONS

### Model 2 - would it be better than the current system, worse, or no significant improvement?

Do you think this system would be better than the current system, worse or of no significant improvement?

Of the 471 responses to this question, 188 (40%) felt Model 2 would be better than the current system, 127 (27%) felt it would be worse and 156 (33%) felt there would be no significant improvement.

**Table 6.1: Model 2 - Better, worse or no improvement by stakeholder group**

	Better	Proportion of group %	Worse	Proportion of group %	No improvement	Proportion of group %
HE (n=131)	17	13%	58	44%	56	43%
Schools & FE (n=131)	67	51%	24	18%	40	31%
Students and reps (n=19)	10	53%	3	16%	6	32%
Individuals (n=159)	84	53%	34	21%	41	26%
Other organisations (n=31)	10	32%	8	26%	13	42%

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=471.

Stakeholder groups differed in their views on this question. A majority of 'Schools and FE' (51%), students (53%) and 'Individual' stakeholders (53%) answered 'better', whilst only 13% of 'HE' stakeholders gave this answer.

Text responses to this question (n=406) incorporated a range of views including extensive discussion of the application process, offer-making, and the impact of Model 2 on prospective students. Comments expressing opposition to the proposals ranged from those suggesting that Model 2 would be similar to or worse than the current system, to

those who noted that the benefits of Model 2 do not outweigh its disadvantages. Responses expressing general support for Model 2 included those who considered that it would be better than the current system and those who saw it as an improvement to Model 1. A few HE stakeholders suggested the UCAS 'Reimagining Admissions' PQO Model 2b may be an improvement on Model 2.

Some felt that underprediction of disadvantaged students is not widespread enough to warrant such a significant change to the admissions system. It was also highlighted that course grade requirements are one of many factors that inform student decision-making, meaning there will always be a certain level of undermatching.

### **Application process and support (219 references)**

Overall, there were mixed views related to the Model 2 application process and support required. Respondents were supportive of Model 2 having a similar application timeframe to the current system. It was outlined that this would maintain the current level of support students receive whilst making applications, as activities such as researching courses and writing personal statements would still take place over a similar length of time and during term time. There was also support for Model 2 on the basis that it could enable additional entry assessments such as auditions and interviews to take place during the Spring and Summer terms, in keeping with the current system.

Concerns relating to the application period and support required under Model 2 included:

- Uncertainty around how interviews, additional entry assessments or portfolio reviews would fit within Model 2. There was concern around how HEPs would decide which students to invite for additional assessment without predicted grades. It was also felt that HEPs may find it challenging to fit these assessments into the post results period.
- Reduced opportunities for HEPs to engage with applicants, for example, through widening participation activities. It was felt this may have a particularly negative impact on disadvantaged students.
- The amount of information available to HEPs potentially reducing the level of targeted support they could provide to applicants.
- Reduced time available for applicants to prepare for the start of term, including making applications for accommodation, bursaries, student finance or additional support.
- That a 'two-tier' system may develop whereby applicants who need to engage with HEPs for the purpose of additional assessments or disability support planning form relationships with HEPs whilst other applicants do not.

- Opposition to a third-party holding applicant information.
- There being too great a length of time between making an application and receiving an offer.
- The limited time between offer-making and the beginning of term for activities such as conducting DBS checks, occupational health clearances or assessing applicants with criminal convictions.
- The absence of predicted grades potentially making applicant decision-making more challenging and leading to disadvantaged students making less aspirational choices.
- The possibility that in Scotland, Model 2 may encourage students to make HE applications after S5, thus undermining the importance of the S6 year.
- Questions regarding how applicants holding completed Level 3 qualifications would make HE applications under Model 2.

### **Offer-making (135 references)**

Some stakeholders expressed support for Model 2 on the basis that it prevents the use of unconditional offers. Others highlighted this as a benefit of Model 2 whilst also expressing concerns.

Several issues were highlighted as areas of concern in relation to offer-making, including:

- The potential impact of a condensed offer-making window on student decision-making and schools' capacity to support students during this time. It was felt that this could have a particularly negative impact on disadvantaged students who may lack other sources of support.
- The potential impact of a condensed offer-making window on HEPs' capacity to process applications. There was a view that Model 2 would have significant implications for HEP staffing and resourcing. It was suggested that making decisions over a much shorter period could impact the quality and fairness of decision-making, while reducing their capacity for contextual and holistic decision-making.
- The importance of making offers shortly after an audition or interview, especially for courses where academic grades are not a key consideration, which may not be possible under Model 2.
- Reduced support for applicants who receive no offers on results day, with less time to make alternative applications and potentially reduced HEP capacity for processing such applications.

- Students achieving the required grades for a course yet still not receiving an offer, with the current system providing greater certainty in this regard.
- Risk that HEPs could make informal offers to students outside of the formal offer-making period, resulting in less transparency than the current system.
- International and mature students who already have their qualifications receiving offers before other students, which some perceived as unfair. In contrast, other stakeholders suggested that if international students did not receive offers until results day they may decide to study elsewhere.
- Applicants applying directly to HEPs to secure earlier offers.
- That the current system allows HEPs to make 'aspirational' offers to students which can act as a motivator during exams.
- Reduced amount of time for appeals to exam boards, with the risk that students subsequently miss out on offers.
- The risk that students may request data held about them as a way of prematurely revealing offers.

Respondents also offered suggestions related to the offer-making process, including:

- Allowing early rejections of applicants that clearly do not meet entry requirements, for example, if they are not studying the required subjects. However, some felt these decisions should not be made prematurely.
- Results across all qualification types being released at the same time, to ensure fairness.
- Including contextual information such as Free School Meals (FSM) status in the headline data released to HEPs earlier in the cycle.

There were also questions regarding whether existing Clearing and Adjustment processes would remain under Model 2.

### **Impact on students (119 references)**

Whilst some respondents felt that receiving offers based on achieved grades may give greater confidence to some applicants, others expressed a range of concerns regarding the potential negative impact of Model 2 on students. These included:

- Greater uncertainty and stress for students if they do not receive offers until the summer.
- Pressure on applicants to make decisions in a short time frame and with fewer opportunities for typical offer holder activities that inform decision-making.

- A shorter offer-making window reducing students' ability to plan for the start of term, including applying for accommodation and bursaries. It was felt that this could lead to students making 'safer' choices, for example, studying closer to home.
- Less time for students to make applications for disability or other forms of support.
- Possible delays to student finance applications which may have a particularly negative impact on disadvantaged students.
- Students losing motivation for exams if they do not have offers to work towards.
- Students potentially receiving a significant amount of communication from HEPs over the Summer term, which may distract them from their exams.
- The impact the condensed timetable may have on rest-of-UK students wishing to study in Scotland.
- Fewer opportunities to build relationships with HEPs potentially impacting retention rates.
- Students spending time familiarising themselves with multiple institutions that they then do not receive offers from (although this is also a feature of the current system).
- That without Clearing, Adjustment and UCAS Extra processes, students will be less able to change their minds.

Some respondents also commented that certain disadvantaged groups are more likely to be overpredicted yet still accepted onto courses, despite missing their offer grade requirements. Model 2 would therefore not benefit these students. In contrast, others suggested that overprediction can often cause greater stress on results day, for example, if it means students then have to navigate Clearing.

### **Impact on HEPs (93 references)**

Responses coded under this theme came predominantly from HE stakeholders. Many responses commented on the lack of clarity in the Model 2 proposals around the data released to HEPs prior to results day. It was suggested that detailed applicant information is released to HEPs to facilitate preliminary decision-making, with offers confirmed once results are known. Others suggested releasing this data would not sufficiently mitigate against the student number forecasting issues detailed below.

A range of concerns were expressed about how Model 2 may impact HEPs, including:

- That the proposed headline data released to HEPs may be insufficient to effectively forecast student numbers. It was highlighted that this would have a significant negative impact on planning across a range of areas, including course delivery, accommodation provision, staffing, budgets, and estate management. This could

impact course quality, particularly for first year students and courses with greater contact time. It was also highlighted that adequate forecasting data is particularly important for Scottish HEPs due to the student numbers cap and widening participation targets.

- Staffing issues arising from the need to process applications and make offer decisions over a condensed timeframe. This could necessitate recruitment of temporary, less specialised, staff and would lead to poorer decision-making. It was suggested that reduced staff capacity may lead to a less fair and transparent offer-making process, based more heavily on grades than other factors such as contextual information.
- The condensed offer-making period placing significant strain on HEP services, including disability support, fees, bursary and scholarship teams and visa support services.
- The challenges of predicting applicant behaviour under Model 2, including the risk of low acceptance rates. This could result in HEPs engaging in multiple rounds of offer-making in the post results day period.
- That Model 2 may require significant changes to operations at HEPs where the academic year starts in early September.
- That moving term start dates to later in the year may impact courses that conduct January assessments.
- The Model 2 offer-making window could lead HEPs to place restrictions on summer annual leave for staff.

### **Students still applying with predicted grades (90 references)**

Responses highlighted that within Model 2, applicants would still be making application decisions based on predicted grades in the same way as the existing system. It was considered that, as a result, students may still apply for courses below their ability and therefore, the problem of undermatching would persist.

It was also highlighted that schools and colleges would still use predicted grades to advise students on appropriate course choices. It was suggested that Model 2 would require HEPs to publish more transparent data on the grade profiles they accept, so students could make realistic assessments of which courses to apply to. Some stakeholders also emphasised the unreliability of predicted grades as a marker of potential.

### **Offers made with achieved grades - better (64 references)**

Some support was expressed for Model 2 on the basis that offers will be made with achieved, rather than predicted, grades. Generally, these respondents commented that Model 2 addresses the problems of unreliable predicted grades, undermatching and unconditional offers, without significantly changing the application, exam, and results timetable. It was also outlined that students accepting offers based on achieved grades brings greater certainty and fairness to these decisions. Others highlighted the above benefits of Model 2 whilst also suggesting that the removal of predicted grades from the application process would reduce pressure on teachers.

### **Impact on exams and education providers (28 references)**

Concerns were raised about the impact that changes to the results timetable may have on awarding bodies. It was noted that this could significantly impact the quality of marking, particularly if exam boards struggle to recruit the necessary additional staff.

One exam board commented that Model 2 may pose less of a risk to the exam system than Model 1, but Model 2 would still cause some disruption; however, changes to term dates and exam timetables could mitigate this.

Whilst it was noted that Model 2 may cause less stress for students and teachers than Model 1, as applications are made before exams, there were also concerns expressed about the impact of Model 2 on schools and colleges, including:

- The additional support required over the summer offer-making period, potentially requiring changes to staff contracts.
- A compressed exam timetable increasing the risk of exam clashes and negatively impacting student wellbeing.
- Greater focus on supporting Year 13 students during the summer period, potentially reducing the amount of HE support provided to Year 12 students in the same period.

### **Other issues**

Stakeholder responses to this question included comments related to issues outside of the themes outlined above, including:

- Comments that the proposals do not sufficiently consider mature students, those with alternative qualifications, international students, or any applicants who have already achieved Level 3 qualifications.

- A suggestion for further engagement with the sector and guidance on how HEPs can assess applications in the absence of predicted grades.
- Comments that flexibility is required in the system to ensure it works across all four nations of the UK.
- Comments that the changes may undermine 5-year Access and Participation Plans.
- A suggestion that there should be a focus on improving the current system rather than introducing either model. For example, banning the use of unconditional offers.
- Comments that the proposals fail to address the attainment gap, which was seen as the main barrier to HE for disadvantaged students.
- Suggestions related to reforming the current system rather than introducing either model. For example:
  - Giving applicants a sixth 'aspirational' choice.
  - HEPs reserving 10% of places for widening participation students.
  - Releasing results to students at the same time as HEPs and introducing a 'cooling off' period before Clearing and Adjustment.
  - Reintroducing AS levels as a predictor of potential.

### **Stakeholder groups**

School and college stakeholders were somewhat more likely to express support for Model 2 on the basis that offers are made with achieved grades and more likely to comment on the potential impact of the proposals on exams and teaching. Concerns were raised about the application process and support students would require, as well as concerns about offer-making, and the potential impact of the proposals on HEPs, generally came from HE stakeholders. There were no significant differences in the views of stakeholders across the other themes.

### **Model 2: Views on the support applicants will need to make their applications to Higher Education under this model, and views on when and how this could be offered**

**Please provide your views on the support applicants will need to make their applications to Higher Education under this model, and do you have views on when and how this could be offered?**

Responses to this question (n=375) showed mixed views. Some considered that applicants would require greater and improved guidance under Model 2 whilst others noted that the

level of support required for students making applications would be similar to the current system (n=121 references). Respondents commenting on the latter often highlighted this as an advantage of Model 2 over Model 1, suggesting that applicants benefit from having a long-time frame in which to work on and submit applications.

### **Greater or improved guidance (109 references)**

Respondents stressed the importance of high-quality guidance and advice for effective decision-making and highlighted the different types of support students require, including support researching courses and universities, preparing for interviews or auditions, completing the application form, and making decisions about offers.

The following reasons were given as to why Model 2 would necessitate greater or improved guidance:

- To mitigate disruption caused by the reforms and ensure that disadvantaged students are not further disadvantaged.
- The removal of predicted grades from the application process.
- The condensed offer-making window, meaning a shortened timeframe for decision-making.
- The increased uncertainty for applicants within Model 2 and the longer gap between applying and receiving an offer.

A few respondents also suggested that improved guidance could do more to tackle mismatching than PQA reform and there were calls for greater investment in careers information, advice and guidance in schools and colleges.

### **Timing of support (122 references)**

Many respondents commented that the support for making applications would remain the same; however, students would require more support than is currently given under the existing system during the summer offer-making window. However, some suggested that a benefit of Model 2 is that students would require less support during the post results period than under Model 1.

There were concerns about the need for additional support during this period, including that:

- Advice and decision-making would be rushed during the condensed offer-making window.

- There would be less time available to support students who do not receive any offers and to help them consider different options. Currently these students are supported over a period of months in the Spring and Summer terms.
- There would be less time available to support students in preparing for HE, for example, applying for accommodation.
- Under the current system, students often have prolonged discussions with staff around which offers to accept. Under Model 2, these conversations would happen outside of term time and within a condensed timeframe.

### **School, college, and HEP capacity (69 references)**

Concerns were expressed that schools may not be able to provide the required level of support to students during the summer offer-making window, including:

- Schools and colleges facing challenges around ensuring enough staff were present to provide support, with possible changes needed to teachers' contracts or additional payments required, as well as a potential negative impact on school and college staff holidays.
- Disparities in the level of support provided to students at different providers and suggestions that Model 2 could exacerbate these inequalities by further advantaging students at well-resourced schools or with other sources of support.

A few respondents stated that the current system spreads the requirement for support more evenly over the academic year, thus reducing the burden on schools and colleges. However, in terms of supporting students, Model 2 may create less of a burden on school and college staff than Model 1.

### **Support from UCAS or HEPs (67 references)**

Some suggested that support could be provided by UCAS or university admissions teams, particularly during the post results offer-making window. Others stated that Model 2 would require greater, improved and more transparent information about entry criteria and the grade profiles accepted by universities.

There were concerns about the short end time frame in the post results offer-making window for support to be provided by universities, UCAS or other organisations. Universities may not have the capacity to support students at this time as they will be focused on offer-making.

Others noted that there would be a reduced time frame for widening participation activities to take place. Comments highlighted the range of activities that HEPs typically offer during the spring offer-making window, with concerns that these would not be able to take place

under Model 2. In addition, it was suggested that targeted activity which takes place under the current system for offer holders would no longer be able to take place e.g., providing information. Engaging with the universities in this way can be motivating for students.

### **Students with additional needs (28 references)**

It was argued that the above concerns regarding reduced levels of support during the offer-making window would have a particularly negative impact on students with additional needs or those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### **Stakeholder groups**

Views on this question did not differ significantly between stakeholder groups; however, there were some small differences. HE stakeholders were generally more likely to make suggestions or raise concerns about support provided by universities or UCAS. Comments regarding school and college capacity for providing support tended to come from school and FE or HE stakeholders. In addition, concerns about support for students with additional needs or those from disadvantaged backgrounds were mainly raised by HE stakeholders.

### **Model 2: Views on any additional factors that should be considered in relation to potential effects on disadvantaged groups, and students with disabilities, mental health issues or other special needs**

**Do you have views on any additional factors that should be considered in relation to potential effects on disadvantaged groups, and students with disabilities, mental health issues or other special needs?**

Responses to this question (n=294) generally highlighted a range of concerns regarding the potential impact of Model 2 on disadvantaged applicants or those who have additional needs. Some comments stated that Model 2 would offer no improvement over the current system for these groups. A very small number of respondents suggested that Model 2 would be an improvement over Model 1 for these groups, predominantly due to the longer application time frame.

### **Support planning (115 references)**

Concerns were raised about the reduced timescale for support planning for those with additional needs under Model 2. Comments highlighted the time required for HEPs to complete needs assessments, review evidence and arrange the necessary support, suggesting that the proposed time between offer-making and the start of term under Model 2 would be insufficient. Respondents provided examples of such support, including making

reasonable adjustments for course assessments, the supply of additional equipment or modifications made to accommodation.

Comments also highlighted the importance of students having sufficient time to liaise with HEPs about their support needs, especially given that students are sometimes reluctant to disclose additional needs prior to being offered a place. It was suggested that early relationship building is particularly important for these students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often engage with their firm choice during the Spring and Summer terms, for example, through widening participation activities. There were concerns that curtailing these opportunities for engagement could impact retention rates.

### **Other concerns**

Other concerns included:

- Possible delays to DSA payments within the given time frame.
- That the condensed timeframe may place additional pressure on HEP support services and could result in students starting their courses without required support in place.

However, in keeping with similar responses to previous questions, there were some suggestions that early release of applicant data could facilitate support planning. A few respondents commented that under Model 2 there would be more time for post-application support planning than Model 1.

### **Application support (100 references)**

Some support was expressed for Model 2 on the basis that disadvantaged groups will continue to receive support with their applications during term time.

Other comments reiterated concerns regarding decreased levels of support over the summer offer-making window, which it was felt would have a particularly negative impact on disadvantaged groups.

There were also concerns raised that making reasonable adjustments for interviews or additional entry assessments may be more challenging under Model 2 than under the current system due to the condensed post application time frame.

### **Student decision-making (46 references)**

It was felt that disadvantaged students and those with additional needs require more time and support to make decisions about their offers. A condensed offer-making window could therefore cause increased stress, anxiety and uninformed decision-making for these

groups, potentially impacting retention rates. There was also a suggestion that this may cause these students to make 'safer', less aspirational choices. Some respondents felt that the longer application period under Model 2 would facilitate more considered decision-making than Model 1.

### **Lack of certainty (48 references)**

Respondents suggested that Model 2 would involve greater uncertainty pre-results, which would disproportionately impact students from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with additional needs. It was felt that these students, for example those on the autism spectrum or with caring responsibilities, particularly benefit from the certainty that comes with advanced offer-making and associated increased preparation time. Comments highlighted the anxiety students experience under the current system when offer-making is delayed, suggesting this would be exacerbated under Model 2.

### **HEP decision-making (29 references)**

Some respondents suggested that Model 2 could lead to more mechanistic, grade-based admissions processes, as the condensed offer-making window would reduce HEPs' capacity for holistic and contextual decision-making. Respondents commented that their concerns around this issue are like those related to Model 1.

It was also outlined that the condensed time frame would impact on the capacity of schools and colleges to alert HEPs about mitigating circumstances that may have impacted a students' results.

There were suggestions for how admissions could be made fairer for disadvantaged groups, for example, having quotas of students from certain backgrounds or a dedicated space on the application form to detail the challenges faced by these young people. It was also suggested that contextual data such as an applicant's FSM status should be released to providers earlier in the year to better facilitate contextual decision-making.

### **Stakeholder groups**

There were few significant differences between the responses given by different stakeholder groups across the above themes; however, concerns about student support planning were predominantly raised by HE stakeholders.

## **Model 2: Views on how students could make choices on which courses and institutions to apply for under this model.**

**Please provide your views on how students could make choices on which courses and institutions to apply for under this model. Your answer could reference the use of ongoing assessment, mock exam grades and prior attainment (e.g., at GCSE).**

Responses to this question (n=372) generally centred around the ongoing need for predicted grades in guiding student decision-making and discussions about how assessment data could be used to inform student choices. Respondents also highlighted the role of school and college staff and HEPs in supporting decision-making.

### **Predicted grades (149 references)**

Respondents stated that schools and colleges will likely continue to provide predicted grades to inform student application choices. These are typically based on a range of factors, such as prior attainment and engagement with learning.

Some responses suggested that removing predicted grades from the application process will make them more accurate, as predictions will be made later in the year and there would be less pressure to inflate grades.

Some stressed the importance of students having an idea of likely attainment to ensure an appropriate mix of realistic back up and aspirational course choices. There was also comment that without predicted grades, undermatching would increase. In contrast, others expressed concerns that under Model 2, applications would still be made using predicted grades. Some also felt that the inclusion of predicted grades within the application process ensures transparency and a certain level of scrutiny of the predictions, which could be lost under Model 2. It was suggested that grade predictions could be improved by teachers providing a range of potential outcomes rather than single grades.

### **Assessment data (160 references)**

Respondents offered a variety of suggestions regarding assessment data that could be used to inform application choices in the absence of predicted grades, including:

- Mock exam results.
- GCSE attainment.
- Coursework grades.
- Formative assessments and classwork.
- Results of modular assessments.

However, some concerns are raised around using these assessment data to inform choices. It was noted that GCSE results may not be a good indicator of academic potential, as students can often make significant progress between GCSE and Year 13, especially if they attend a better school or college to complete their Level 3 qualifications. For this reason, concerns were also raised about HEPs relying more heavily on GCSE results when making admissions decisions. In addition, mock exams, formative assessments, and classwork were felt to lack standardisation and therefore may not be reliable.

Other forms of alternative assessment were suggested to aid student decision-making, including:

- Reintroducing AS Levels, as it was felt these were a particularly useful and reliable indicator of potential A level attainment.
- U.S. style Standardised Assessment Tests.
- The recent use of Teacher Assessed Grades.

It was highlighted that students in Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as those studying modular courses such as BTECs, already have some Level 3 attainment results to inform their application choices.

### **Teachers and support staff (80 references)**

Respondents commented that teachers and other support staff at schools and colleges are best placed to advise students on their expected attainment and application choices. It was suggested that these discussions would continue to take place regardless of whether predicted grades are used in the application system.

Respondents also highlighted the important role teachers, tutors and support staff play in guiding students to make a mixture of realistic, aspirational, and backup choices and in helping students consider non-grade-based factors.

As with previous questions, concerns were raised about disparities in levels of support and there were calls for greater investment in and improvements to careers advice and guidance within schools and colleges, particularly for disadvantaged students.

### **Guidance from HEPs, including clear grade requirements (20 references)**

Respondents highlighted the role HEPs play in guiding student choices and expressed concern that Model 2 may limit opportunities for such support. It was stated that HEPs should provide greater clarity around accepted grade profiles, with support expressed for UCAS's historic entry grades tool for advisers. Current entry requirements were described as more of a 'marketing tool' than a useful guide for students. It was also felt that more

should be done to improve student understanding of entry requirements related to subject choices and qualification types.

### **Other Comments**

There were comments from some institutions, such as conservatoires, highlighting that they do not typically place a lot of emphasis on predicted or achieved grades. Others commented that students make decisions based on a range of factors aside from entry grade profiles and predicted grades.

### **Stakeholder groups**

HE stakeholders were more likely to comment on guidance from HEPs supporting student decision-making. HE stakeholders were just as likely to comment on the need for clear grade requirements as schools and college stakeholders. There were no other significant differences between stakeholder groups across the other themes.

### **Model 2: Implications for the way in which students apply.**

**Under this model, would you expect there to be implications for the way in which students apply, which for most undergraduate students is currently through a centralised admissions service (UCAS) rather than directly to higher education providers?**

Of the 436 responses to this question, 137 (31%) stated 'yes', 216 (50%) stated 'no', and 83 (19%) stated 'not sure'. Views differed between HE and other stakeholders, with a majority of HE (57%) answering 'yes' whilst most 'School and FE' stakeholders (65%) and 'Individuals' (61%) answered 'no'.

**Table 6.2: Model 2 - Implications for the way in which students apply to HE**

Stakeholder group	Yes	Proportion of group %	No	Proportion of group %	Not sure	Proportion of group %
HE (n=129)	74	57%	34	26%	21	16%
Schools & FE (n=127)	25	20%	82	65%	20	16%
Students and reps (n=18)	5	28%	8	44%	5	28%
Individuals (n=136)	23	17%	83	61%	30	22%
Other organisations (n=26)	10	38%	9	35%	7	27%

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=436.

The qualitative responses to this question (n=204) included concerns about the risk of HEPs adopting unfair admissions practices and the potential impact of this on students. Support was also expressed for maintaining the use of one, centralised admissions system.

### **HEP admissions practices (96 references)**

Concerns were expressed, generally from HE stakeholders, about the risk under Model 2 of HEPs accepting greater numbers of direct applications, introducing additional entry assessments, or making informal offers. It was felt that HEPs would adopt these practices to ensure early engagement with applicants, greater control over admissions and better forecasting of student numbers. Respondents expressed concern that such a system would be fragmented, less transparent and unfair.

A few universities explicitly stated that they would consider moving away from UCAS in the event of PQA/PQO reform. As with previous questions, there were suggestions that HEPs should be allowed to make early rejections of applicants who do not meet subject choice or qualification type requirements.

### **Impact on students (44 references)**

Responses reiterated concerns about the potential negative impact of a fragmented system on applicants. It was felt that a two-tier system could emerge whereby applicants who already have their Level 3 qualification results (e.g., international students, mature students, students taking gap years) receive offers earlier in the year. Students may also be incentivised to make direct applications, further benefitting those who are already advantaged and have greater levels of support or knowledge of the sector.

### **Keeping UCAS or a centralised system (62 references)**

Respondents expressed support for keeping UCAS or some form of centralised admissions system. Highlighted benefits of UCAS include:

- Ensuring a standardised, effective, and simple admissions system.
- Maintaining fairness; a more fragmented system would be confusing to navigate and further disadvantage already disadvantaged students.
- The collection of national data about applications and admissions.
- That it is one of the key strengths of the UK higher education sector.

There was also the suggestion that under Model 2, UCAS should have the power to regulate potential HEP informal offer-making.

### **Application timescales (25 references)**

There were reiterated suggestions regarding early release of data and concerns about how auditions and additional entry assessments would fit within the condensed offer-making window. It was felt that implementation of Model 2 would require consideration of the application timescales for accommodation and student finance.

Comments also sought clarification as to whether the Oxbridge and medicine deadlines would remain the same under Model 2 and suggestions that these early deadlines negatively impact disadvantaged students.

### **Clearing and Adjustment (10 references)**

It was suggested that Model 2 would still require Clearing and Adjustment, with responses questioning how these processes would operate. There were concerns that applicants may simply wait until Clearing to apply and that the Clearing process places pressure on applicants to make significant decisions in a very short window of time.

## The impact on UCAS (8 references)

There were some concerns about resource implications for UCAS under Model 2, particularly given the condensed time frame.

## Stakeholder groups

Most of the comments regarding HEP admissions practices and the impact on applicants came from HE stakeholders. Most comments expressing support for UCAS, or some form of centralised system came from HE and school and FE stakeholders.

## Model 2: Limits on how many courses students can apply for

### Should there be limits on how many courses they can apply for?

Of the 451 responses to this question, 346 (77%) answered 'yes' 53 (12%) answered 'no' and 52 (11%) answered 'not sure'. For all stakeholder groups, the larger proportion stated 'yes', with HE stakeholders most likely to agree with limits on course choices.

**Table 6.3: Model 2 - Should there be limits on the number of courses students can apply for?**

Stakeholder group	Yes	Proportion of group %	No	Proportion of group %	Not sure	Proportion of group %
HE (n=134)	117	87%	6	4%	11	8%
Schools & FE (n=125)	103	82%	12	10%	10	8%
Students and reps (n=18)	7	39%	7	39%	4	22%
Individuals (n=149)	101	68%	26	17%	22	15%
Other organisations (n=25)	18	72%	2	8%	5	20%

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=451.

Amongst the qualitative responses to this question (n=331) there was general support for having limits on course choices, with many agreeing with the current limit of five. Some respondents (mainly HE stakeholders) suggested fewer choices, whilst others suggested PQA would necessitate an increase in the number of course choices allowed.

### **Agreement with limits (91 references)**

Respondents expressed general support for having limits on course choices. It was stated that limits are needed to support students in narrowing down their application choices and to ensure decision-making about offers is manageable.

Respondents commented that limits help to reduce the administrative burden on universities and suggest that without limits:

- The admissions process could become unmanageable.
- Less time would be spent considering each application.
- It would be challenging for HEPs to forecast and control student numbers.
- HEPs would incur greater costs related to application processing.

It was noted that limits would be particularly necessary under Model 2 to ensure that HEPs are able to process applications within the proposed condensed offer-making window.

### **Same as current limits (116 references)**

There was significant support for keeping the current limit of five choices. Reasons were similar to those given for supporting limits in principle. It was also felt that the current limits enable students to choose a good mixture of realistic, backup, and aspirational choices.

Comments made suggested that current limits are manageable for admissions teams and that increasing the number of choices may limit capacity for contextual decision-making. A few respondents also viewed the current limits as facilitating relationship building and engagement between students and HEPs.

There was also support for maintaining the option for students to add one additional choice through UCAS Extra.

### **Fewer choices (53 references)**

Support for fewer choices generally came from HE stakeholders. It was felt that fewer choices would reduce the administrative burden on universities, particularly given the condensed offer-making time frame.

It was suggested that students often used their fourth and fifth choices simply as 'space fillers', especially given that most students are successful in gaining a place at their first-choice university. As such, HEPs spend time and resources processing applications from students who have no intention of studying with them. It was also stated that potentially holding 5 unconditional offers post-results could be overwhelming for students.

The most common number of choices suggested was three, although some responses suggested a range of between three and five choices would be optimal. There were also some suggestions that if course choice limits were reduced, Clearing, Adjustment, and UCAS Extra processes would be required.

### **More choices (43 references)**

Those expressing support for increasing course choice limits felt that this would be necessary to mitigate the potential increased uncertainty under Model 2, with students requiring a greater number of choices to allow for a wider range of possible grades achieved. Other respondents supported this view, commenting that more choices would allow students a broader spread between realistic, aspirational, and backup choices.

Of those suggesting a greater number of choices, many suggested only increasing the number to six or seven, although a few suggested 10 or more.

### **Model 2: Higher education providers' views on how quickly applications could be processed under this model.**

**If you are a higher education provider, we would be interested in your views of how quickly applications could be processed under this model.**

Of the text responses to this question (n=156), many stated that processing applications would be challenging or impossible within the proposed Model 2 timeframes. There were suggestions that the early release of applicant data would best facilitate this process.

### **Challenging within timeframe (87 references)**

Respondents expressed concern about compressing admissions processes that currently take many months into a matter of weeks, suggesting it would be challenging to fit offer-making within the proposed timescale. Specific concerns included:

- Condensed timescales could reduce HEPs' capacity for contextual decision-making. These comments tended to stress the importance of considered and holistic decision-making as key principles of fair access, suggesting that this takes time.
- Application processing could become heavily automated and, within a more grades-based admissions system, HEPs would struggle to distinguish between similarly

qualified applicants. Alternatively, the compressed timescale could result in first come, first served admissions processes.

- Significant resource and staffing implications, which may be more heightened at smaller HEPs. Staff workloads could become very uneven throughout the year, with the potential for increased use of fixed term and zero hours contracts.
- Planning for the start of term once offers had been made would not be possible within the given timeframe.
- Processing times may vary considerably between HEPs.
- The condensed offer-making window would be particularly challenging for courses with multi-stage application processes such as medicine and dentistry, as well as those requiring DBS and occupational health checks.
- There may be insufficient time for second round offers in the case of empty places or adequate time to deal with appeals.
- Condensing admissions decision-making into a shortened timeframe would reduce the capacity of HEPs to support applicants during the process.
- The proposed timeframe leaves little time for fee status and eligibility to study in the UK checks to be completed.
- Some students may have to wait much longer than others for offers, particularly those awaiting other qualification results such as GCSEs.

Generally, it was suggested that HEPs would require a minimum 10–12-week timeframe to process applications, although shorter and longer timescales were also given by some respondents. It was felt that whilst limiting the number of course choices would make the process more manageable, it would still be challenging with the proposed timeframe.

There were also some suggestions that allowing applicants to rank course choices would help HEPs to forecast and manage intake numbers. There were also comments stating that processing times were difficult to predict without further information, including:

- Expected application volumes.
- The number of course choices applicants are allowed.
- The management and timing of auditions, interviews, and additional entry tests.
- Whether or not applicant data is made available to HEPs pre-results day.
- Whether or not personal statements are removed from the application.

### **Possible within timeframe (28 references)**

It was considered that application processing would be more manageable under Model 2 than under Model 1; however, most comments suggested that processing applications within the proposed timeframe would be conditional on certain factors, including the early release of applicant data and auditions, interviews, and additional entry tests taking place prior to results day.

### **Early release of data (27 references)**

Respondents reiterated suggestions for the early release of applicant data to enable HEPs to make preliminary decisions and on this basis expressed support for the PQA model proposed by UCAS.

There were suggestions that the early release of applicant results, as is currently done via the Awarding Body Linkage, would support HEPs to process applications within the proposed timeframe, with some respondents also suggesting a longer embargo period prior to results day.

## **Model 2: Views on how additional entry tests, auditions and interviews could be accommodated under this model.**

**Please provide your views on how additional entry tests, auditions and interviews could be accommodated under this model.**

The general view across responses to this question (n=327) was that additional entry tests, auditions and interviews would be challenging to fit within the post-results window. As such, many respondents suggested that the timing of these additional entry assessments under Model 2 should not differ significantly from the current system, and that this could be facilitated by early release of applicant data.

### **Timing: same as the current system (post-application, pre-results) (77 references)**

These comments suggested that auditions, interviews, and additional entry tests would best be completed after applications are made yet before results day, in keeping with the current system, as it was felt this would be the most manageable option for HEPs. To enable this, it was again suggested that applicant data would need to be released to HEPs prior to results day.

Responses also highlighted the importance of interviews and auditions for relationship building between students and HEPs, suggesting it is therefore beneficial for these to take place earlier in the application cycle. Some responses, whilst suggesting that additional

entry assessments take place at a similar time to the current system, considered that these should not be conducted close to or during the exam period.

### **Timing: post results (36 references)**

Many responses coded within this theme commented that it would either be very challenging or impossible for HEPs to complete these additional assessments within the post-results window. Staffing was seen as the key barrier, with many academic staff on annual or research leave at this time. There were also concerns that students would have less access to support from schools and colleges to prepare for these assessments during the summer.

There were concerns that HEPs may invite fewer students to interview or audition if these took place post-results, and that there may also be a risk of HEPs introducing more automated processes for selecting applicants for these assessments. A few respondents suggested that it would be possible to conduct these assessments within the post results window, particularly if HEPs had early access to applicant data.

### **Concerns about additional entry assessments (57 references)**

In addition to the above concerns about accommodating these assessments within the post-results window, respondents raised other concerns, including:

- Reiterated concerns about HEPs increasing the use of additional entry tests, auditions, and interviews to facilitate early engagement with applicants, with the subsequent risk of:
  - Early informal offer-making.
  - The development of a two-tier admissions system.
  - Further disadvantaging students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who typically receive less preparation support and may not have the means to attend multiple interviews or auditions.
- How HEPs would select applicants for interviews or auditions without prior information, including applicants' predicted grades. Interviewing all applicants would be inefficient and undermine the Schwartz principle of applicants not taking unnecessary assessments.
- Questions around when applicants would receive offers; applicants tend to want to receive offers shortly after audition or interview.
- Reiterated concerns about the challenge of conducting non-academic assessments such as DBS checks within the proposed time frame.

### **Timing: during or post exams (20 references)**

There were some suggestions for these assessments to be conducted during or after exams, however, respondents also raised concerns about the potential negative impact of this on students' exam performance and preparation as well as on their summer holidays.

### **Other suggestions about additional entry assessments**

Respondents offered the following suggestions in relation to interviews, auditions and additional entry tests:

- Increased use of online tools, such as virtual meetings or pre-recorded videos.
- Greater transparency around how additional assessments are used in admissions decisions.
- Limiting the use of additional entry tests as they tend to favour already advantaged students.
- Introduction of US style SATs or the creation of a centralised assessment network.
- Reforms to additional entry assessments to improve fairness.

### **Stakeholder groups**

Concerns about additional entry assessments and suggestions for the early release of data largely came from HE stakeholders. In relation to the other themes, there were no significant differences between views across the different stakeholder groups.

### **Model 2: Views on the support students will need to make their applications to Higher Education and views on when and how this could be offered**

**Under Model 2, offers would be made to applicants after results day, outside of term time. Please provide your views on the support students will need to make their applications to Higher Education under this model, and do you have views on when and how this could be offered?**

Many responses to this question (n=351) echoed comments made under previous questions relating to student support, for example, suggestions that students will need greater levels of support during the summer and concerns about the capacity of schools and colleges to provide this.

### **Support from schools and colleges (118 references)**

Many respondents stated that school and college staff are best placed to support students at this time. However, it was suggested that greater numbers of students will require support than under the current system, because many students will need help deciding between multiple offers and some may not receive any offers. Others stated that many students would only require minimal support, as most would have decided on their preferences prior to results days.

### **Capacity to support prospective students (103 references)**

Reiteration of concerns expressed under previous questions about the capacity of schools and colleges to support students during the summer offer-making window were made. Issues raised include those related to potential changes to pay and contracts, and the impact on teachers and support staff holidays with the subsequent negative effect on staff morale. In addition, there were concerns about disproportionate negative impacts on disadvantaged students, and regarding a lack of adequate support. Respondents also expressed concerns that students making appeals and those who received no offers may require support in September, already a very busy time of year for schools and colleges.

There were again calls for greater investment and resources to facilitate the additional support that schools and colleges would need to provide to students over the summer offer-making window.

### **Support from UCAS, HEPs and other organisations (72 references)**

Some respondents suggested that UCAS, HEPs or other organisations could provide support to students during the summer offer-making window. However, much like with schools and colleges, there were also concerns about the capacity of such organisations to provide support within the proposed timeframe. It was also felt that support provided by HEPs may not be impartial.

As with previous questions, concerns were raised about the limited opportunities under Model 2 for HEPs to deliver summer offer-holder days or widening participation activities, which it was felt are an important source of support for applicants.

### **Same as the current support (50 references)**

Some respondents stated that the level of support required over the summer offer-making window under Model 2 will remain largely the same as under the current system.

### **Less support required than Model 1 (24 references)**

Some respondents stated that the level of support students would require post results day under Model 2 was less than the level of support required under Model 1, because students will have already made their applications so would only require support with decision-making.

### **Model 2: Views on any additional implications under this model for students, higher education providers and courses.**

**Please provide your views on any additional implications under this model for students, higher education providers and courses not already covered above.**

Responses to this question (n=179) generally reiterated the concerns raised in answers to previous questions, with some respondents expressing explicit opposition to Model 2, whilst a smaller proportion offered support for the proposals.

### **HEP admissions (70 references)**

Respondents repeated concerns related to the potential negative impact of Model 2 on HEPs, the risk of HEPs adopting unfair admissions practises and the condensed timeframe for admissions decision-making and additional entry assessments such as DBS checks.

### **Other concerns**

Other concerns raised included:

- Calls for greater consideration within the proposals of applicants with criminal convictions and the time needed to assess these applications.
- The view that Model 2 may put the HE sector at a competitive disadvantage internationally, as international applicants seek earlier confirmation of offers elsewhere.
- That there is a lack of consideration within the proposals for applicants with alternative qualifications to A levels or applicants who already hold Level 3 qualifications such as mature students.
- That the proposals do not adequately account for HEPs that have multiple start dates throughout the year.
- The possible implications of the proposals for the other nations in the United Kingdom, particularly Scotland.

## **The impact on students (55 references)**

Again, respondents reiterated concerns relating to possible negative impacts on students, including retention rates, increased uncertainty and anxiety, moving towards a more grades-based admissions system, widening participation, and the continued use of predicted grades to inform application decisions.

Some responses stressed that grades are not the only factor influencing student choice and that the best option for a student is not always the university with the highest tariff. In relation to the condensed offer-making window, additional concerns were raised and how this may reduce the time available for appeals and shorten students' preparation time prior to the start of term, especially regarding student finance.

## **Suggested changes to the proposals or alternative reforms (32 references)**

There were some suggestions for changes to the proposals, such as altering HEP term dates, the removal of references from the application form or allowing early rejections of applicants combined with a mechanism to enable these applicants to make an additional course choice. Alternatives to PQA reform were also suggested, including:

- Measures to improve access for disadvantaged groups, such as high-quality tutoring, contextualised admissions and improved advice and guidance.
- Increased transparency around entry requirements and accepted grade profiles.
- Banning unconditional offers.
- Pushing the acceptance date for offers back until after results.
- Quotas for widening participation candidates.
- Better availability of contextual information during the application process.
- Reintroduction of AS Levels as an indicator of potential.

## **Emailed responses**

Those who responded by email were generally more supportive of Model 2 than Model 1. They highlighted a range of the above issues, including:

- Removing insurance choice removes HE holding back places.
- Lack of support at application stage has a greater impact on disadvantaged and disabled students. For example, the time period for Disability Support Allowance applications may result in students starting their course before support is in place.

- Some feel it allows for effective IAG support for students, while others feel that there may be problems with providing such support over the summer due to teaching contracts.
- There is reduced time for: institutions to make holistic decisions, engage with students about needs, students to prepare and transition. Lack of time for institutions to assess personal statements will give greater weighting to results.
- Support and advice are needed to explain that meeting the grade requirements may not mean an offer can be made due to oversubscribed courses so time also needed for personal statement review and interviews etc.
- Clarity needed on qualifications with different results days. There is a view that A level and equivalent results need to be brought forward to allow for sufficient preparation time.
- A condensed exam period and/or change of results date will create challenges in terms of marking capabilities and less learning time if exams are to be brought forward to enable more time between results and offers.
- Risks of under recruitment at universities.
- Interviews and assessments may be used more frequently to the detriment of disadvantaged students and those who do not have quality guidance.

## 7 FURTHER QUESTIONS

### **Views on how the education sector could support the implementation of a PQA system.**

**Please provide your views on how the education sector could support the implementation of a PQA system. This can refer to the roles of schools, further education colleges, higher education providers and charities/representative bodies and can include suggestions around staffing, infrastructure and funding.**

A significant focus of responses to this question (n=299 text responses) was the need for high-quality support and IAG for students, provided by schools and colleges, HEPs or other organisations, within any model of PQA reform. Resources and finance implications of PQA implementation were also highlighted, as well as the need for collaboration between key stakeholders and sufficient lead times.

#### **Role of schools and colleges in the application process (102 references)**

Responses coded under this theme called for greater and improved advice and guidance for students within schools and colleges, along with increased funding and minimum standards for HE and careers advice. These comments either stressed the necessity of these measures for managing the transition to PQA or suggested improved guidance as an alternative to PQA reform.

Those suggesting the former tended to also highlight the need for funding to pay school and college staff who would support students over the summer under either PQA model. IAG was highlighted as being particularly important for disadvantaged students and there were reiterated concerns about disparities in the level and quality of support available.

#### **Role of HEPs in the application process (58 references)**

Some respondents commented on how HEPs might support both students and school and college staff during PQA implementation. It was suggested that HEP widening participation and outreach teams would continue to play a role in supporting students. However, concerns were raised about how HEPs would support students in the absence of detailed applicant information. It was also felt that, whilst school and college staff generally know their students well and therefore tend to be best placed to support them, support was also needed from UCAS and HEPs to ensure these staff had a good understanding of the new system.

In contrast to this, a few respondents commented that universities should not be responsible for filling gaps in careers advice provision within schools and colleges. There were also suggestions that regulations should be introduced to ensure that unfair

recruitment practises do not emerge, particularly those that lead to pressurised and rushed applicant decision-making.

### **Non-school/college or HEP delivered careers advice and guidance (33 references)**

Some respondents suggested that other organisations, such as charities, have a role to play in ensuring students are well informed about any new PQA system. It was suggested that these organisations could provide IAG, particularly for disadvantaged students, and that this support may be more impartial than that of schools, colleges or HEPs. There was a proposal that this support could be provided by a centralised advice service.

### **Resource and finance implications (94 references)**

Linked to the above points around increased need for careers information and advice, it was emphasised that additional funding would be required to ensure this support was in place. Concerns were also raised about the resource implications for HEPs in terms of hiring additional admissions and outreach staff, as well as restructuring admissions infrastructure, including IT systems. Smaller institutions would have less capacity to adapt to these changing resourcing needs.

The resource implications for awarding organisations were highlighted, with suggestion that completing marking within a condensed time frame may require additional funding. There were also calls for further reviews and consultation to better understand the resource implications of managing PQA implementation.

### **Managing the transition to PQA (94 references)**

Many comments coded under this theme emphasised the varied stakeholders who would be involved in the transition to PQA and stressed the need for collaborative working and support across the education sector. Some felt this could include potential new data sharing agreements. It was also suggested that the reforms may require significant changes to student finance and the disabled student allowance system. There was also frequent mention of ensuring sufficient lead time for any reforms, especially as the sector recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Changes to exams in schools and colleges (38 references)**

There were mixed views on exam dates, with some suggesting they could be moved slightly earlier if assessments were shortened, or the number of exams reduced. Others felt exams should not be moved any earlier, as this could place significant pressure on students and teachers to cover the necessary curriculum in a shortened timeframe. It was

also felt that a condensed exam period would cause greater stress and anxiety for students.

A few respondents suggested the re-introduction of modular assessments and AS levels could provide better indications of expected attainment than current predicted grades. There was also a suggestion that PQA reform would require alignment of Level 3 and Level 2 results days.

### **Academic terms (22 references)**

It was suggested by some that academic term dates could be changed to better facilitate PQA reform. However, others expressed concern about PQA reform on the basis that it may necessitate changes to university term dates.

### **Stakeholder groups**

Generally, comments relating to managing the transition to PQA and the role of HEPs in PQA implementation tended to come from HE stakeholders. In relation to the other themes, there were no significant difference between the views of the different stakeholder groups.

### **Should personal statements be removed from the application process?**

#### **Should personal statements be removed from the applications process?**

Of the 460 responses to this question, 107 (23%) answered 'yes', 242 (53%) answered 'no' and 111 (24%) answered 'not sure'. Across all stakeholder groups, the larger proportion stated 'no', with individual stakeholders the most likely to answer 'yes' (47 or 31%).

Table 7.1: Should personal statements be removed from the HE application process?

Stakeholder group	Yes	Proportion of group %	No	Proportion of group %	Not sure	Proportion of group %
HE (n=134)	26	19%	71	53%	37	28%
Schools & FE (n=128)	28	22%	75	59%	25	20%
Students and reps (n=17)	2	12%	8	47%	7	41%
Individuals (n=154)	47	31%	71	46%	36	23%
Other organisations (n=27)	4	15%	17	63%	6	22%

Source: YCL analysis of consultation responses, 2021. Base=460.

Of the qualitative responses to this question (n=423) most highlighted the important role personal statements play in the admissions process as well as the benefits students gain in completing them. There was a view from some that statements are no longer necessary or that they are unfair due to disparities in levels of support, with respondents offering suggestions to tackle these inequalities.

### **Views that personal statements are an important part of the selection process (255 references)**

Many respondents commented that personal statements were an important part of the selection process. Others stated that personal statements were only reviewed in particular circumstances. Personal statements were seen to provide an opportunity for applicants to present a more holistic view of themselves, including their motivations and any contextual factors, and that they help universities decide between equally qualified applicants. Responses highlighted that for some vocational courses such as medicine, having details of applicants' work experience and volunteering are essential. It was also stated that statements provide useful information about students with non-traditional qualifications and mature students.

There was some concern that, in the absence of personal statements, admissions teams may place greater emphasis on academic grades or could introduce additional assessments, both of which it was felt could negatively impact disadvantaged students.

### **The benefits for students (120 references)**

Many respondents highlighted that the process of writing a personal statement provides students with an opportunity to reflect on their motivations, strengths and course choices and therefore aids decision-making. It was also felt that the process provides good practise for completing job applications.

A few respondents suggested that personal statements increase engagement with extra-curricular activities that are beneficial for students. There was also a view that they give students a sense their application is being judged on more than just academic attainment and that their removal would therefore cause greater stress and anxiety.

### **Personal statements no longer useful or relevant (68 references)**

Those commenting that personal statements are no longer useful or relevant tended to suggest that they are typically not read by admissions teams, are an unreliable predictor of academic attainment and are sometimes not written by the students themselves. It was considered that they take up a considerable amount of students' and school and college staff's time which is disproportionate to the amount they are actually used in admissions decisions, particularly in maths and science-based subjects.

### **Disparities in support and opportunities (108 references)**

Concerns were raised that the inclusion of personal statements in the application process advantages those who attend better resourced schools and colleges and those who have greater access to support outside school/college. In addition, it was felt that students who have the means to take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and work experience are at a greater advantage. There were suggestions that the quality of a personal statement tends to reflect the level of support provided rather than the applicant's capabilities or potential.

Some of these responses suggested that personal statements should be removed from the application process due to these disparities, whilst others suggested ways to address these disparities which are summarised in the following section.

### **Suggested changes to the statement or alternatives (157 references)**

Many respondents suggested changing the format of the personal statement to include a standardised structure or set of questions. It was considered that this could make the process fairer by giving students more of a guide as to what should be included, with some suggesting that questions could differ between courses.

Rather than removing the personal statement, some respondents called for greater support and guidance for students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. There were also suggestions that universities could decide which courses require a personal statement. For example, statements may be of more use for essay-based subjects rather than maths and science courses.

### **Teacher/tutor references (14 references)**

A few respondents commented on teacher/tutor references, with some suggesting that these should be removed (they are always positive and therefore are not useful) whilst others supported their inclusion within the application form (they provide space for highlight contextual factors).

### **Stakeholder groups**

HE stakeholders were more likely than other stakeholders to state that personal statements are an important part of the assessment process or to suggest changes or alternatives. Across the other themes related to this question, there were no significant differences in the views expressed by different stakeholder groups.

## **Views on the impact of schools and colleges no longer using predicted grades to guide students in their higher education choices.**

**Please provide your views on the impact of schools and colleges no longer using predicted grades to guide students in their higher education choices.**

Of the responses to this question (n=410), many highlighted the ongoing need for schools and colleges to use grade predictions to decision-making about application choices. Despite this, some suggested the removal of predicted grades from the application process would positively impact school and college staff, whilst others highlighted potential impacts (both positive and negative) for students.

### **Ongoing need for grade predictions (211 references)**

Many respondents commented that predicted grades would still be used to support students in making application decisions. The consensus was that students would still require some indication of their likely attainment to ensure that they selected a good mix of realistic, backup, and aspirational course choices.

There was also a suggestion that removing predicted grades from the application process may result in more accurate predictions, as teachers would face less pressure to inflate the grades given.

### **Positive impacts for schools and colleges (77 references)**

Comments coded under this theme highlighted the positive impact of removing predicted grades from the application process on schools and colleges. Staff would face less pressure from students and parents around predicted grades, which can have a significant negative impact on teacher student relationships. Due to the high stakes nature of these decisions, staff often have multiple, lengthy conversations with students about their predicted grades. It was therefore suggested that their removal would free up staff time and that discussions about students' progress and attainment could become more honest and productive.

Some comments also highlighted that the process of predicting grades has become more challenging since the removal of AS levels.

### **Impact on student expectations and motivation (39 references)**

In contrast to the above positive impacts for schools and colleges, some comments suggested that without predicted grades, students may make inappropriate choices (under Model 2) that are either unrealistic or not sufficiently aspirational. It was also stated that predicted grades give students something to aim for and that without them, some students could lack motivation. Others considered that the removal of predicted grades from the application process may prevent some students from being 'pigeonholed' or having their aspirations limited.

### **Inaccuracy or unreliability of predictions (81 references)**

Some respondents suggested that predicted grades are often inaccurate, with teachers facing pressure from parents and students to inflate predictions to meet course entry requirements. Further to this, there was frustration that some entry requirements do not accurately reflect the grade profiles typically accepted onto the course. It was also noted that predicted grades are made in the autumn term, with many students often able to improve their attainment significantly throughout the rest of the year.

It was suggested that the process of predicting grades requires greater consideration, with the recent use of Centre Assessed Grades a potentially useful avenue of enquiry related to this. A few respondents commented that, whilst predicted grades are unreliable, HEPs know this and therefore factor it into their decision-making, thus reducing the negative impact of this unreliability.

### **Fairness and transparency (41 references)**

These comments suggested that an absence of predicted grades within the application process would ensure greater fairness and transparency. Some respondents also

expressed support for the UCAS tool showing historic entry grade profiles, suggesting this greatly improves transparency.

### **Stakeholder groups**

'Schools and FE' and 'Individual' stakeholders were most likely to state the positive impacts of removing predicted grades for schools and colleges. There were no significant differences between stakeholder responses within the other themes, although there were more comments related to the ongoing need for predicted grades from higher education stakeholders than from other stakeholder groups.

### **International students are not currently in scope of proposed PQA – levels of agreement that this is the correct approach**

**International students are not currently in scope of proposed PQA for a number of reasons (international exams work to different timetables outside the UK, many international students do not apply for UK courses via UCAS, and international students require additional time ahead of term starts to apply for/be granted visas etc). Do respondents agree this is the correct approach given circumstances? If not, what are the key reasons as to why international applicants should be included in scope?**

Of the responses to this question (n=300), views were mixed regarding keeping international students out of scope of the proposed PQA reform. There were concerns that this could result in separate admissions systems, creating a system that was unfair and confusing. However, it was also felt that visa application processing times would make including international students within a PQA system unworkable and that the reforms may negatively impact international student recruitment.

There also appeared to be some confusion about what was meant by 'in scope'. Many responses, whilst not necessarily agreeing that international students should use the same PQA system proposed for UK students, nonetheless stressed the importance of considering the impact of the reforms on international students and the international student market.

### **Fair admissions (102 references)**

Concerns were raised that if international students made applications in a significantly different way to UK students, this could lead to unfairness. It was outlined that there may be a risk of a 'two-tier' system developing, whereby places are filled earlier in the year by international students at the expense of UK students. Some suggested that HEPs would

be encouraged to do this under a PQA system, as early confirmation of international student places would give greater certainty over intake and fees.

There were suggestions that the public already perceive international students as having an advantage under the current system, as higher fees make them more attractive to HEPs, and this this could be further exacerbated under a PQA system.

In addition, it was felt that having multiple different admissions routes could be logistically challenging for HEPs and may cause confusion amongst applicants. It was highlighted that many international students study in the UK and that it would be challenging for schools and colleges to support two different application systems. Furthermore, a few respondents commented that some of the issues cited for why international students are considered out of scope also apply to certain groups of UK students. For example, issues related to the need for longer application timeframes also apply to disabled UK applicants.

### **Impact on HE sector (89 references)**

Respondents expressed concern that the UK could become a less attractive destination for international students to study, either due to PQA reform generally or through including international students within the scope of PQA. Comments stressed the importance of international students for the HE market and there was a view that any reforms must not create additional barriers for international students to study in the UK, such as the introduction of a more complex and fragmented admissions systems.

It was also felt that running two separate admissions systems, for UK and international students, would be costly and complex for universities.

### **Agreement – international students out of scope (106 references)**

Responses coded under this theme expressed general agreement that international students should remain out of scope of PQA reform, with many respondents simply stating their agreement without offering further detail.

Of those who did provide reasoning for their agreement, some noted that the focus of the reforms should be on UK students, especially as they make up the largest proportion of students in the UK. Some also highlighted the complexities of including international students within a PQA system. Respondents highlighted that many international students make applications via UCAS and that, despite being out of scope of PQA reform, they should continue to be able to do so.

### **Application timescales (57 references)**

Some respondents agreed that international students should remain out of scope on the basis that they require longer application timeframes to complete visa applications. It was stated that neither of the proposed PQA models would allow enough time given current visa application timescales and other processes such as reviewing academic qualifications or assessing fee status. In contrast to this, a few respondents felt that these were not good enough reasons for excluding international students from PQA reform.

### **Defining international students (55 references)**

There were questions raised around how international students would be defined, with respondents suggesting that applicant fee status is not always clear at the start of the application process. It was highlighted that non-UK citizens study at UK schools and colleges whilst UK citizens also study for Level 3 qualifications overseas. If PQA reform led to separate admissions routes, it may be unclear to these students which system they should use.

### **Stakeholder groups**

Most of the comments relating to application timescales, defining international students, fair admissions, and the impact on international recruitment were made by HE stakeholders. Of those agreeing that international students should remain out of scope of PQA reform, there were no significant differences between the stakeholder groups.

### **Applications from students who do not currently apply through UCAS**

**Please provide any views that you have on treating applications from students who do not currently apply through UCAS and, in particular, whether a move to a PQA system would imply changes in how applications from non-UCAS applicants are considered.**

Of the responses to this question (n=218), views were mixed. Some felt that there would be little change in how non-UCAS applicants are considered or alternatively expressed support for non-UCAS application routes. Others expressed some concern about potential increases in direct applications within a PQA model and there was support for most applicants applying through a centralised system.

### **Concerns related to non-UCAS applications (88 references)**

There were reiterated concerns about PQA reform resulting in increased direct applications to HEPs. It was again argued that this could create a 'two tier system' with greater complexity, confusion, and unfairness than the current system. It was also suggested that greater volumes of direct applications would lead to less transparency.

Alongside the above concerns, respondents felt there was a need to ensure that existing direct applicants, typically part-time or mature students, are not disadvantaged. Respondents highlighted the requirement for careful consideration of the potential impact on these applicants.

### **Support for non-UCAS applications/no change**

It was stated by some respondents that the option for applicants to apply outside of the UCAS system should be maintained, particularly in relation to mature students, some international applicants, those who have taken a gap year and those applying for part-time courses. Some commented that they do not feel PQA reform would significantly impact how non-UCAS applicants are considered.

### **Support for a centralised admissions system (48 references)**

Respondents expressed support for one centralised admissions system on the basis that it helps to ensure fairness, transparency, and simplicity, as well as facilitating collection of admissions data.

### **Stakeholder groups**

Across all themes, responses to this question generally came from HE stakeholders. Where other stakeholders did provide responses, these tended to either express support for a centralised admissions system or express concerns about non-UCAS applications.

### **Additional thoughts, ideas or feedback on the policy proposals outlined in this document.**

**Please provide any additional thoughts, ideas or feedback on the policy proposals outlined in this document.**

Responses to this question (n=209) tended to reiterate concerns, suggestions or support articulated earlier in the consultation.

Concerns about one or both models (n=138 references) included:

- The impact on disadvantaged students and/or those with disabilities and additional needs, including concerns related to support planning and retention rates.
- Condensed timeframes within both models affecting HEP planning and resourcing and their capacity for contextual admissions decisions.
- Increased use of automated selection processes and a greater focus on academic achievement within admissions decisions.
- Multiple admissions routes and increased unfair admissions practices (with less transparency).
- Reduced levels of support for students and rushed decision-making, as well as increased stress and anxiety and decreased motivation in the absence of conditional offers.
- The impact on other application processes such as student finance and accommodation.
- That it was not possible to compress exam marking timeframes any further.
- A lack of consideration in the proposals for mature students or those applying with Level 3 qualifications already achieved.

Some outlined that the case for change was weak, particularly in Scotland, where there is less reliance on predicted grades in the application process and unconditional offer-making is less common. Others commented on the issues the reforms are attempting to address, for example, suggesting that the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers is much more of a barrier to HE participation than the admissions system.

General comments were made stating that the proposals do not offer a significant improvement to the current system and there was also concern about introducing such a significant change as the sector recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Alternative models or reforms (78 references)**

Respondents offered suggestions of alternative models of PQA reform or measures that could be introduced as an alternative to PQA reform. These included:

- Suggestions for greater and improved IAG in schools and colleges.
- Banning unconditional offer-making.
- Quotas for widening participation students.
- Expanding and improving Clearing and Adjustment.

- A more structured approach to personal statements.
- Measures to decrease the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers.
- Changes to exams, such as the re-introduction of AS levels or introduction of a grade point average system and multiple-choice standardised assessments.
- Measures to improve the accuracy of predicted grades and greater clarity around how they are used in admissions decisions.
- Removing predicted grades from the application form.
- The development of a national standard for contextual offer-making and the creation of a HE sector code of practice.
- Publication of historic entry grade profiles.
- Reducing the number of course choices, combined with mechanisms for making new choices if applicants are rejected.
- Greater oversight and regulation of university admissions, including how HEPs set grade requirements and HEP offer-making practises.
- Shortening the offer-making window within the current application cycle.
- Allowing applications to both Oxford and Cambridge.
- Making individual level contextual data available at the point of application, for example, introducing a more structured approach to references with dedicated space for contextual information.

The most common suggestions for alternative PQA models included:

- Support for the UCAS Model 2b outlined in the report 'Reimagining UK Admissions'.
- Post-Qualification Choices: students applying and receiving offers in the same way as the current system, with offers only accepted once results are received. It was suggested this could be combined either with a reduction in the number of course choices allowed or students 'expressing interest' in up to three offers prior to results day, without making firm decisions. There was also suggestion that this model may require an earlier results day to allow time for decision-making.

### **Suggested changes and/or additional considerations (65 references)**

Some responses suggested changes to the proposals, including:

- Moving HEP term start dates to better facilitate PQA reform.

- Building on opportunities for students to engage with their university choices throughout the academic year.
- Including some form of Clearing within Model 2.
- Publishing exam results earlier.
- Regulation to prevent unfair admissions practises emerging under either model.
- If early rejections are allowed within Model 2, allowing applicants to add additional choices if they receive a rejection.

In addition to these suggestions, some responses urged greater consideration of certain issues, including:

- The implications of the proposals across the four nations of the UK.
- Qualifications other than A levels, such as BTECs or the International Baccalaureate.
- The potential impact of the reforms on children who are home schooled.

### **Support for the proposals (43 references)**

Comments coded under this theme either expressed support for PQA reform generally or expressed support for one specific model. Alongside these comments was recognition of the challenges that the education sector will face in implementing a PQA system.

### **Support for the current system (27 references)**

Some responses viewed the current system as preferable to either of the two PQA models proposed.

### **The consultation process (30 references)**

In addition to calls for further engagement with key stakeholders, some respondents raised concern about the consultation process, including that the consultation:

- Did not include questions on teacher references.
- Was lengthy, with very technical language.
- Took place at a time when the education sector may not have had the capacity to engage with it.
- Did not propose the current system as a potential option.
- Lacked sufficient detail for respondents to comment fully on the proposals.

- Appeared to focus predominantly on the English education system.
- Lacked consideration of work done by UCAS, such as the proposed PQA Model 2b and recent publication of historic grades on entry data.

## **Stakeholder groups**

Responses to this question generally came from HE stakeholders, with some concerns about the proposals also made by school and college stakeholders.

## **Emailed responses**

A few of those who responded by email, referenced the Model 2b which was proposed by UCAS. Model 2b is a one-year process of applications which can be switched out throughout the year before results are released, to allow for admission tests/interviews. Unsuccessful applications can be swapped. Allows for relationship building for additional needs/support. Offers are made after results. HE can forecast and plan ahead of time.

The issues in relation to Model 2b included:

- Allows for interviews/portfolio assessment to take place.
- Allows for substitute choices following unsuccessful interviews/admission tests.
- Need to ensure IAG is available for all students from all settings during decision time.
- Commitment to stop conditional unconditional offers by HE providers.
- Investment into IAG including training teachers is required.
- Investment through Access and Participation plans will be required to increase applications from disadvantaged students.

A few other suggestions in relation to any other systems included:

- Banning unconditional offers.
- The need to factor in time for exam appeals.
- There could be a move towards greater use of direct applications which may create greater complexity for applicants.

## **8 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY (PSED) QUESTION**

### **Representations and/or evidence on the potential impact of our proposals on people with protected characteristics for the purposes of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010).**

**Please provide any representations and/or evidence on the potential impact of our proposals on people with protected characteristics for the purposes of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010).**

Most responses to this question (n=111) highlighted concerns or issues for further consideration regarding the potential impact of the proposals on those with protected characteristics. A small number of responses suggested the proposals would not have specific impacts on these groups (n=8) whilst others highlighted some positive impacts (n=8).

### **Negative impacts for those with protected characteristics (62 references)**

Many comments coded within this theme highlighted concerns about the impact of the proposals on those with disabilities, special educational needs or mental health problems, particularly due to the proposed compressed application and offer-making timescales. Concerns included:

- A lack of time for discussions about support planning and reasonable adjustments, with the risk that these students may start courses without the necessary support in place. Responses emphasise the importance of early engagement with these applicants.
- A lack of time to make applications for DSA.
- Reduced time for these students to research what support is available at different HEPs when deciding on offers.
- Less time for disabled students to find appropriate accommodation prior to starting their course.
- That students with disabilities were not considered within the preliminary equality analysis for the consultation.
- The risk that a compressed exam timetable may negatively impact those who require additional time in exams.
- That a compressed timescale may have a particularly negative impact on those with anxiety or students on the autistic spectrum.

It was noted that the proposals reduce the potential for contextual admissions decisions, therefore potentially negatively impacting a range of applicants with protected

characteristics. Comments also suggested that reduced opportunities for widening participation activities and engagement with HEPs may have a similarly negative impact on applicants with protected characteristics.

It was highlighted that some students from ethnic minority groups are more likely to come from a disadvantaged background and therefore could be disproportionately impacted by reduced levels of support during the summer period. There was also suggestion that those from POLAR 1 areas and black students are most likely to receive overpredicted grades, meaning the proposals could have a significant negative impact on these groups.

In addition, it was stated by some that the proposals lack consideration for mature applicants and/or those with caring responsibilities, with the latter typically being women. These applicants may lack the time over the summer period to make applications or consider offers, and the compressed timescale may make planning work and childcare to fit around their studies more challenging.

### **Suggestions or issues for consideration (31 references)**

Comments suggest that the proposals require greater consideration for those with special educational needs, disabilities, mental health problems, and those who may be home educated. There were calls for more research into the potential impact of the proposals on those with protected characteristics, particularly disabled students, as well as calls for a **full equality impact assessment** of the reforms and further consultation with affected groups.

It was suggested by some that Model 2 provides greater opportunity for engagement between students with additional needs and HEPs throughout the year; however, advice and guidance would be needed to reassure applicants that declaring any additional needs would not disadvantage their application.

## APPENDIX A: ONLINE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

The online consultation included 11 closed questions. These along with the responses to each question have been set out below.

Section	Question	Number of responses
<b>Section 1:</b> About you	Are you responding as an individual, or as part of an organisation?	491
	If you are responding as an individual, please confirm whether you are parent, carer, guardian, child/young person, other.	188
<b>Section 2:</b> Initial questions	On a scale of 1-5 how satisfied are you with the present admissions system?	489
	Would you in principle be in favour of changing the current Higher Education admissions system to a form of post-qualification admissions, where students would receive and accept university offers after they have received their A level (or equivalent) grades?	489
<b>Section 4:</b> Model 1: post-qualification applications and offers	Do you think this system would be better than the current system, worse, or no significant improvement?	489
	Under this model, would you expect there to be implications for the way in which students apply, which for most undergraduate students is currently through a centralised admissions service (UCAS) rather than directly to higher education providers?	489
	Should there be limits on how many courses they can apply for?	489
<b>Section 5:</b> Model 2: pre-qualification applications with post-qualification offers and decisions	Do you think this system would be better than the current system, worse, or no significant improvement?	488
	Under this model, would you expect there to be implications for the way in which students apply, which for most undergraduate students is currently through a centralised admissions service (UCAS) rather than directly to higher education providers?	485
	Should there be limits on how many courses they can apply for?	490

<b>Section 6:</b> Further questions	Should personal statements be removed from the applications process?	489
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The coding framework guided the coding and thematic analysis of text responses (open questions). For each of the open questions, up to 10 themes (nodes or codes) were identified initially based on a systematic sample of all responses (n=100). These codes were reviewed for analysis of the complete set of responses after the consultation had closed. Under each of the open questions, we have included a list of themes and the frequency with which text was coded to each theme (the number of references made). Longer responses resulted in a larger coding volume and as such more references.

## Section Two: Initial questions

Would you, in principle, be in favour of changing the current Higher Education admissions system to a form of post-qualification admissions, where students would receive and accept university offers after they have received their A level (or equivalent) grades?

**Total number of responses = 444**

Number of references	Theme
133	Support for consideration of PQA model
130	Impact on disadvantaged students
129	Accuracy of predicted results
115	Disagreement with or uncertainty about PQA
113	Impact of contracted timescales
95	Fairer and more informed decision-making
42	Unconditional offers
41	Impact on schools and colleges
30	Reduced stress and anxiety for students

### Section Three: PQA delivery and implementation

PQA Delivery and Implementation Issues - If you think these issues should not rule out consideration of the model above, please explain why, providing supporting evidence where possible.

**Total number of responses = 262**

<b>Number of references</b>	<b>Theme</b>
97	Agreement, a better system
62	HE academic timetables
42	Impacts on international students
39	Gap – end of school/college term and HE start
25	Impact on disadvantaged groups

## Section Four: Model 1: Post-qualification applications and offers

Do you think this system would be better than the current system, worse, or no significant improvement? In the text box below, you can refer to the potential costs, adverse effects or implementation challenges of such a reform.

**Total number of responses = 423**

Number of references	Theme
245	Model 1 – timescales
194	Model 1 – negative impacts and drawbacks
127	Impact on HEP offers and applications process
97	Entrance tests, interviews, or auditions – impacts and accommodation
39	Earlier Level 3 exams
31	Impact of earlier results day

Please provide your views on Level 3 results day being brought forward to the end of July, in order to provide time for students to apply to Higher Education with their Level 3 results already known. What effect do you think this could have on students, teachers, schools, and colleges and how best could this be facilitated?

**Total number of responses = 443**

Number of references	Theme
189	Impacts on schools, colleges, and staff
141	Support and guidance for prospective students
108	Support for Level 3 results day in July
97	Impact on exam boards, examiners, and preparation of results
97	Managing the proposed timescale
70	Opposition to proposals

Please provide your views on the support applicants will need to make their applications to Higher Education under this model, and do you have views on when and how this could be offered? How could students best prepare their application for HE before they receive their Level 3 (A level and equivalent) results? - Please explain. This can include reference to support for researching and completing applications, deciding which offers to accept, and support put in place before they start HE. It could also refer to ensuring that all applications are treated fairly by higher education providers.

**Total number of responses = 429**

<b>Number of references</b>	<b>Theme</b>
217	Provision of student support and IAG
128	The HE applications and admissions process
103	Impact of different timescales
97	Role of teachers and tutors and impact on schools and colleges
78	HEPs' response, role, and preparation
63	Impact on disadvantaged groups

Do you have views on any additional factors that should be considered in relation to potential effects on disadvantaged groups, and students with disabilities, mental health issues or other special needs?

**Total number of responses = 352**

<b>Number of references</b>	<b>Theme</b>
132	Proposals less beneficial for these groups
102	Time constraints
63	Support and guidance for students
59	Suggested new or alternative approaches
22	Roles of schools and colleges

Please provide your views on how additional entry tests, auditions and interviews could be accommodated under this model.

**Total number of responses = 401**

<b>Number of references</b>	<b>Theme</b>
161	Not possible or difficult to accommodate under Model 1
137	Timings of auditions, interviews, or entry tests
92	Suggested new approaches, models, or alternatives
73	Student support, impact, and preparation
57	Role of an impact on HE providers
35	Can be accommodated under Model 1

Under this model, would you expect there to be implications for the way in which students apply, which for most undergraduate students is currently through a centralised admissions service (UCAS), rather than directly to higher education providers? - If yes, what implications and why?

**Total number of responses = 266**

<b>Number of references</b>	<b>Theme</b>
108	Comments on UCAS – use and acceptability
108	Direct applications to HEPs
68	Impact on students
53	Model 1 timeframes and admissions process
40	Suggested system or process changes and alternatives

Should there still be limits on how many courses they can apply to? If yes, what limits and why?

**Total number of responses = 371**

Number of references	Theme
156	Lack of certainty, student decision-making and impacts
146	Course limits proposed
114	Impacts on HEP planning, management, and resources
60	Discussion of lower limits
47	Effectiveness of the current system

If you are a higher education provider, we would be interested in your views of how quickly applications could be processed under this model.

**Total number of responses = 162**

Number of references	Theme
109	Processing and volume of applications
100	Model 1 – impact of proposed timeframe
36	Model 1 – views on unsuitability
19	Impacts on support and IAG for students

Please provide your views on any additional implications under this model for students, higher education providers and courses not already covered above.

**Total number of responses = 205**

Number of references	Theme
100	Model 1 – views on proposals and impacts of change
66	Impact on prospective students
62	Model 1 – proposed timeline
48	Impacts on HEP planning, processes, and resources
17	Impact on schools or colleges and staff

## Model 2: Pre-qualification applications with post-qualification offers and decisions

Do you think this system would be better than the current system, worse, or no significant improvement? Please explain.

**Total number of responses = 406**

Number of references	Theme
219	Application process and support
135	Offer-making
119	Impact on students
93	Impact on HEPs
90	Still applying with predicted grades
64	Offers made with actual grades - better
56	Other
47	Opposition to the proposals
28	Impact on exams and teaching
26	Agreement – a better system

Please provide your views on the support applicants will need to make their applications to Higher Education under this model, and do you have views on when and how this could be offered?

**Total number of responses = 375**

Number of references	Theme
122	Timing of support
121	No change in support
109	Greater or improved guidance
69	School & college staff capacity
67	Support from UCAS or HEPs
36	Other
28	Students with additional needs

Do you have views on any additional factors that should be considered in relation to potential effects on disadvantaged groups, and students with disabilities, mental health issues or other special needs?

**Total number of responses = 294**

Number of references	Theme
115	Planning student support with HEPs
100	Application support
48	Lack of certainty
46	Student decision-making
35	No improvement for these groups – general
31	Other
29	HEP decision-making
22	Mismatching
10	Improvement for these groups

Please provide your views on how students could make choices on which courses and institutions to apply for under this model. Your answer could reference the use of ongoing assessment, mock exam grades and prior attainment (e.g. at GCSE).

**Total number of responses = 372**

Number of references	Theme
160	Assessment data
149	Predicted grades
80	Teachers and support staff
43	Need clear grade requirements
39	No change
35	Other
21	Aspirational and back up choices
20	Guidance from universities
10	Non-grade based factors

Under this model, would you expect there to be implications for the way in which students apply, which for most undergraduate students is currently through a centralised admissions service (UCAS), rather than directly to higher education providers? If yes, what implications and why?

**Total number of responses = 204**

Number of references	Theme
96	HEP admissions practices
62	Keep UCAS system
44	Impact on applicants
25	Application timescales
16	Other
10	Clearing and Adjustment
8	Impact on UCAS

Should there still be limits on how many courses they can apply to? If yes, what limits and why?

**Total number of responses = 331**

<b>Number of references</b>	<b>Theme</b>
116	Same as current limits
91	Agreement with limits
53	Fewer choices
43	More choices
22	Other
6	No limits

If you are a higher education provider, we would be interested in your views of how quickly applications could be processed under this model.

**Total number of responses = 156**

<b>Number of references</b>	<b>Theme</b>
87	Challenging within timeframe
28	Possible within timeframe
27	Early release of data
10	Other
8	Difficult to predict

Please provide your views on how additional entry tests, auditions and interviews could be accommodated under this model.

**Total number of responses = 327**

Number of references	Theme
89	Timing – post application
77	Timing – same as current system
57	Suggestions about additional assessments
57	Concerns about additional assessments
36	Timing – post results
26	Early release of data
20	Timing – during or post exams, pre-results
16	Other

Under Model 2, offers would be made to applicants after results day, outside of term time. Please provide your views on the support students will need to make their applications to Higher Education under this model, and do you have views on when and how this could be offered?

**Total number of responses = 351**

Number of references	Theme
118	Support from schools and colleges
103	Capacity to support
72	Support from UCAS, HEPs or other organisations
50	Same as current support
37	Additional support – general
24	Less support than Model 1 or current system
13	Suggested changes to the proposals
10	Other

Please provide your views on any additional implications under this model for students, higher education providers and courses not already covered above.

**Total number of responses = 179**

Number of references	Theme
70	HEP admissions practices
55	Impact on students
35	Opposition or general concerns
32	Suggestions
21	Other
12	Impact on schools & colleges
6	Support for the proposals

## Section Six: Further questions

Please provide your views on how the education sector could support the implementation of a PQA system. This can refer to the roles of schools, further education colleges, higher education providers and charities/representative bodies and can include suggestions around staffing, infrastructure, and funding.

**Total number of responses = 299**

Number of references	Theme
102	Role of schools and colleges in the application process
94	Managing the transition to PQA
94	Resource implications and financing
44	Other
58	Role of HEPs in the application process
38	Changes to exams in schools and colleges
33	Non-school/college or HE based CEIAG
22	Academic terms
10	Alternative reforms

Should personal statements be removed from the application process?

**Total number of responses = 423**

Number of references	Theme
255	Important part of the selection process
157	Changes or alternatives proposed
120	Benefits for students
108	Disparities in support and opportunities
68	No longer useful or relevant
24	Other
14	References
8	The impact of limited timescales
4	HE sector decision

Please provide your views on the impact of schools and colleges no longer using predicted grades to guide students in their higher education choices.

**Total number of responses = 410**

Number of references	Theme
211	Ongoing need for grade predictions
81	Inaccuracy or unreliability of predictions
77	Positive impacts for schools or colleges
46	Other
41	Fairness and transparency
39	Impact on student expectations
35	Impact on student productivity and motivation
8	Unrealistic or unacceptable change

International students are not currently in scope of proposed PQA for a number of reasons (international exams work to different timetables outside the UK, many international students do not apply for UK courses via UCAS, and international students require additional time ahead of term starts to apply for/be granted visas etc). Do respondents agree this is the correct approach given circumstances? If not, what are the key reasons as to why international applicants should be included in scope?

**Total number of responses = 300**

Number of references	Theme
102	Fair admissions
106	Out of scope
89	Impact on HE sector
57	Application timescales
55	Defining international students
29	In scope
17	Other
17	Suggestions

Please provide any views that you have on treating applications from students who do not currently apply through UCAS and, in particular, whether a move to a PQA system would imply changes in how applications from non-UCAS applicants are considered.

**Total number of responses = 216**

Number of references	Theme
88	Concerns about non-UCAS applications
48	Support for one, centralised system
34	Support for non-UCAS applications
29	No change
17	Suggestions
8	Other

Please provide any additional thoughts, ideas or feedback on the policy proposals outlined in this document.

**Total number of responses = 208**

Number of references	Theme
138	Concerns about one or both models
78	Alternative models or reforms
65	Suggested changes to one or both models
43	Support for the proposals
30	Consultation process
27	Support for current system
11	Other

## Public Sector Equality Duty

Please provide any representations and/or evidence on the potential impact of our proposals on people with protected characteristics for the purposes of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010).

**Total number of responses = 110**

Number of references	Theme
62	Negative impact for those with protected characteristics
31	Suggestions
8	No specific impacts
8	Positive impacts
6	Other

## APPENDIX B: STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

### A level and equivalent Level 3 Student Survey

Are you a Year 13 (sixth form or second year college) student who lives in the United Kingdom?

	Count	Percentage
Yes	831	81%
No	194	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,025</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base=1,025 (all respondents)

Which nation in the United Kingdom are you living in?

	Count	Percentage
England	827	99.5%
Scotland	1	0.1%
Wales	3	0.4%
Northern Ireland	0	0%
The British Islands e.g., the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>831</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 831 (those who answered 'Yes' to 'Are you a Year 13 student who lives in the United Kingdom?')

Are you planning on applying to go to university next academic year?

	Count	Percentage
Yes	700	84%
No	106	13%
Not sure	24	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>830</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 830 (those who answered 'Yes' to 'Are you a Year 13 student who lives in the United Kingdom?' = 831)

Which of the following best describes where you are in the application process?

	Count	Percentage
I am thinking of applying but have not yet started the process	0	0%
I have started my application form	2	0.3%
I have submitted an application	722	99.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 724 (those who answered 'yes' or 'not sure' to Are you planning on applying to go to university next academic year?)

How easy or difficult did you find each of the following aspects of applying to university?

Choosing what course to take

	Count	Percentage
Very easy	15	22%
Fairly easy	27	39%
Neither easy nor difficult	11	16%
Fairly difficult	12	17%
Very difficult	4	6%
Not applicable/ I haven't needed to do this yet	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 69

### Choosing what universities to apply to

	Count	Percentage
Very easy	6	9%
Fairly easy	23	34%
Neither easy nor difficult	13	19%
Fairly difficult	18	26%
Very difficult	8	12%
Not applicable/ I haven't needed to do this yet	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 68

### Writing your personal statement

	Count	Percentage
Very easy	2	3%
Fairly easy	15	22%
Neither easy nor difficult	20	29%
Fairly difficult	24	35%
Very difficult	8	12%
Not applicable/ I haven't needed to do this yet	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 69

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

### The use of predicted grades

	Count	Percentage
Very easy	10	14%
Fairly easy	16	23%
Neither easy nor difficult	14	20%
Fairly difficult	15	22%
Very difficult	13	19%
Not applicable/ I haven't needed to do this yet	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 69; Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

### Getting a reference from a teacher or careers advisor

	Count	Percentage
Very easy	34	49%
Fairly easy	22	32%
Neither easy nor difficult	9	13%
Fairly difficult	4	6%
Very difficult	0	0%
Not applicable/ I haven't needed to do this yet	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 69

### Meeting the UCAS/ university application timescales

	Count	Percentage
Very easy	22	32%
Fairly easy	21	30%
Neither easy nor difficult	13	19%
Fairly difficult	8	12%
Very difficult	5	7%
Not applicable/I haven't needed to do this yet	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 69

How much support and/or guidance, if any, has your school or college given you on your application?

	Count	Percentage
Lots of support	343	47%
Some support	289	40%
Not much support	78	11%
No support at all	13	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 723 (those who answered 'I have started my application form' or 'I have submitted an application' to 'Which of the following best describes where you are in the application process?' = 724)

Where else have you sought support from? (Please tick all that apply) Multi-response

	Count	Percentage
Parents/Carers	489	68%
Other family members	220	30%
Friends	367	51%
Mentor/Tutor outside of school/college	121	17%
The internet /online resources	544	75%
Other (please state)	19	3%

Base = 723 (those who answered 'I have started my application form' or 'I have submitted an application' to 'Which of the following best describes where you are in the application process?' = 724)

Overall, do you feel like you have received enough support when completing your university application?

	Count	Percentage
Yes, definitely	301	42%
Yes, to some extent	320	44%
No	92	13%
Don't know	10	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 723

Who would you have liked more support from? (Please tick all that apply) Multi-response

	Count	Percentage
Teachers	72	10%
School or college support staff	82	11%
Parents/Carers	7	1%
Other family members	1	<1%
Friends	2	<1%
Mentor/Tutor outside of school/college	15	1%
Other (please state)	7	1%

Base: Assumed to be 723

Are there any aspects of the UCAS application system that you would like to see change? (Please tick all that apply) Multi-response

	Count	Percentage
Application deadlines	150	21%
Accepting offers deadlines	189	26%
The use of predicted grades	262	36%
School/College references	71	10%
Personal statements	122	17%
Other (please state)	81	11%
I do not think anything needs changing	234	32%

Base = 723 (those who answered 'I have started my application form' or 'I have submitted an application' to 'Which of the following best describes where you are in the application process?' = 724)

Do you think it would be better for students to apply to university earlier in the year based on their predicted grades, or in the summer based on achieved grades?

	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Earlier in the year based on predicted grades	293	41%
In the summer based on achieved grades	337	47%
Not sure	93	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 723

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Do you think it would be better for students to receive and accept their offer from universities based on when they have their predicted grades or after they get their actual grades in the summer?

	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Based on predicted grades	205	28%
Based on their actual grades	463	64%
Not sure	55	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 723

If a system was in place where you applied or were given offers to university during the summer holidays, do you think you would need support from teachers, advisors or others during the application and decision-making process? (Please tick all that apply) Multi-response

	Count	Percentage
Yes, I would need support with applying	482	67%
Yes, I would need support making decisions	305	42%
No, I could do this with help from others (family/carers/friends/mentors)	114	16%
No, I could do this independently	59	8%

Base = 723 (those who answered 'I have started my application form' or 'I have submitted an application' to 'Which of the following best describes where you are in the application process?' = 724)

To what extent, if at all, have your predicted grades affected which university you are applying for?

	Count	Percentage
Greatly	274	38%
A little	254	35%
Not at all	167	23%
Not sure	28	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 723

To what extent, if at all, have your predicted grades affected which courses you are applying for?

	Count	Percentage
Greatly	166	23%
A little	192	27%
Not at all	343	47%
Not sure	22	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 723

How do you think your final grades will compare to your predicted grades?

	Count	Percentage
They will be better	128	18%
They will be the same	303	42%
They will be worse	92	13%
Not sure/too early to say	200	28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 723

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Which of these motivates you to do well in exams? (Please tick all that apply) Multi-response

	Count	Percentage
To help with my future career	145	20%
To get into the university of my choice	354	49%
To make my parents proud	61	8%
To make my teachers proud	16	2%
Sense of pride	85	12%
Other (please state)	60	8%

Base: Assumed to be 723

## Student Survey

Were you living in the United Kingdom for the three years before the start of your course?

	Count	Percentage
Yes ordinarily resident	990	97%
No	33	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1023</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 1023 (all respondents)

Immediately before you started the course, in which nation were you living in the United Kingdom?

	Count	Percentage
England	976	100%
Wales	1	<1%
Scotland	0	0%
Northern Ireland	0	0%
The British Islands e.g. the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man	1	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>978</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 978 (those who answered 'Yes ordinarily resident' to 'Were you living in the United Kingdom for the three years before the start of your course?' = 990)

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

How easy or difficult did you find each of the following aspects of applying to university?

#### Choosing your course

	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very easy	249	28%
Fairly easy	381	43%
Neither easy nor difficult	91	10%
Fairly difficult	126	14%
Very difficult	36	4%
Not applicable/I didn't need to do this	3	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 886

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

#### Choosing your university

	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very easy	187	21%
Fairly easy	371	42%
Neither easy nor difficult	124	14%
Fairly difficult	158	18%
Very difficult	35	4%
Not applicable/I didn't need to do this	3	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>878</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 878

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

### Writing your personal statement

	Count	Percentage
Very easy	54	6%
Fairly easy	244	28%
Neither easy nor difficult	173	20%
Fairly difficult	307	35%
Very difficult	99	11%
Not applicable/I didn't need to do this	6	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>883</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 883

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

### The use of predicted grades

	Count	Percentage
Very easy	91	10%
Fairly easy	221	25%
Neither easy nor difficult	213	24%
Fairly difficult	122	14%
Very difficult	82	9%
Not applicable/I didn't need to do this	150	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>879</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 879

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

### Obtaining a reference from a teacher/careers advisor

	Count	Percentage
Very easy	273	31%
Fairly easy	330	37%
Neither easy nor difficult	101	11%
Fairly difficult	81	9%
Very difficult	39	4%
Not applicable/I didn't need to do this	58	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>882</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 882

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

### Meeting the UCAS application timescales

	Count	Percentage
Very easy	259	29%
Fairly easy	358	41%
Neither easy nor difficult	132	15%
Fairly difficult	86	10%
Very difficult	26	3%
Not applicable/I didn't need to do this	21	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>882</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 882

Who supported you the most through your university application process? (Please tick all that apply) Multi-response

	Count	Percentage
School/College teachers/lecturers	466	47%
School/College support staff	189	19%
Parents/Carers	403	41%
Other family members	123	12%
Friends	224	23%
Mentor/Tutor outside of school/college	49	5%
Other (please state)	17	2%
The internet / online resources	229	23%
I supported myself	326	33%

Base = 990 (those who answered 'Yes ordinarily resident' to 'Were you living in the United Kingdom for the three years before the start of your course?' = 990)

Did you apply for your university through clearing/the UCAS adjustment service?

	Count	Percentage
Yes, I applied through clearing/the adjustment service	134	15%
No, I didn't apply through either clearing or the adjustment service	732	85%
<b>Total</b>	<b>866</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 866

When applying through clearing/the adjustment service, do you think you received less support and guidance on your application from your school/college over the holidays than you otherwise would have during term time?

	Count	Percentage
Yes	61	62%
No	38	38%
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 99 (those who answered 'Yes' to 'Did you apply to university through clearing/the UCAS adjustment service?' = 134)

How did you manage this process with reduced support?

	Count	Percentage
Got help from parents/carers	21	35%
Got help from other family members	10	17%
Got help from friends	12	20%
Got help from a mentor/tutor outside of school/college	4	7%
Other (please state)	13	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 60 (those who answered 'Yes' to 'When applying through clearing/the adjustment service, do you think you received less support and guidance on your application from your school/college over the holidays than you otherwise would have during term time?' = 61)

Are there any aspects of the UCAS application system that you think should be changed?  
 (Please tick all that apply) Multi-response

	Count	Percentage
Application deadlines	144	15%
Accepting offers deadlines	178	18%
The use of predicted grades to determine university offers	366	37%
School/College References	101	10%
Personal statements	176	18%
Other (please specify)	46	5%
I don't think any aspects should be changed	205	21%

Base = 990 (those who answered 'Yes ordinarily resident' to 'Were you living in the United Kingdom for the three years before the start of your course?' = 990)

Do you think it would be better for students to apply to university earlier in the year based on their predicted grades, or in the summer based on achieved grades?

	Count	Percentage
Earlier in the year based on predicted grades	205	28%
In the summer based on achieved grades	411	56%
Not sure	114	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>730</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 730

Do you think it would be better for students to receive and accept their offer from universities when they have their predicted grades, or after they get their achieved grades in the summer?

	Count	Percentage
Based on predicted grades	131	18%
Based on their achieved grades	523	72%
Not sure	74	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>728</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 728

If you had been able to apply to university after receiving your exam results, do you think this would have changed any of the following?

	Count	Percentage
The course you studied	108	13%
The university you attended	225	28%
Other (please state)	57	7%
I don't think it would have changed anything	421	52%
<b>Total</b>	<b>811</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 811

Did your predicted grades affect which university and course you applied for?

	Count	Percentage
Yes	321	41%
No	376	48%
Not sure	94	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>791</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 791

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Were your overall predicted grades higher, lower or the same as your final grades?

	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Higher	251	33%
Lower	206	27%
The same	312	41%
<b>Total</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base = 769

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



E02722903

978-1-5286-3201-0