

# Improving the Higher Education Applications Process



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**Government Response to the Consultation**

May 2006

**IMPROVING THE HIGHER EDUCATION  
APPLICATIONS PROCESS**

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## FOREWORD

Last September, the Department for Education and Skills published an important consultation document about the ways in which students' applications to higher education are made and handled. It was an important document in several respects. Not only did it make proposals for changes to the existing applications system but it also grasped the nettle that has scratched away at successive administrations for more radical reforms for a brand new system based on applications made after examination results are known. Significantly, although led from the Department by Sir Alan Wilson, Director-General for Higher Education, the document was the culmination of 12 months' close work with a very wide range of stakeholders in each of the constituent countries of the UK. For all these reasons, I am delighted now to set out our response to the consultation with the full support and endorsement of my Ministerial colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The consultation clearly showed a will across the sector to seek improvements to the present system. Many of the proposals received widespread support and we are happy to recommend that those proposals are taken forward as soon as possible. There is no doubt that there is an overwhelming desire to improve the advice and information available to enable students to make well-researched, effective applications to higher education and to encourage those who may lack confidence to seek a place in higher education. Many of you have given invaluable suggestions on practical ways of improving the information that is available.

The two options for a form of post-qualification applications (PQA) were not widely supported. There remains a gulf between those who would wish to see limited change and those who would wish to see a full PQA system, with the consequence of major changes to significant parts of the teaching, examination, assessment timetable and the start of the HE term. We believe, nevertheless, that the changes we recommend for 2008/09 will realise some of the key benefits of PQA and lay firm foundations for further steps in that direction. Crucially, the proposed new system for 2008/09 will offer those students who achieve higher grades than required by their first firm conditional offer the chance to seek an alternative place that best matches their aspirations and circumstances. We want to build on the step-change that these early reforms represent and, in light of experience of them, commit to working for the introduction of PQA from 2012. We have recommended a further review in 2010/11 to facilitate that objective.

We make these recommendations recognising that changes to the HE applications system can only be implemented effectively with the agreement and collaboration of stakeholders across the spectrum of the education sector. That is why we recommend that, as proposed in the consultation document, a Delivery Partnership, representative of those stakeholders, should be established to lead the implementation of our recommendations.

We wish to thank all of those individuals, stakeholders and representative bodies who have worked so hard to help Sir Alan achieve so much in such a difficult and often contentious area. We would also like to thank all of you who took the time and effort to complete the consultation questionnaire, enabling us to present these recommendations to the sector and look forward to the progress that will be made through the proposed Delivery Partnership.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Rammell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a light blue shadow effect behind the text.

Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, Department for Education and Skills

*on behalf of:*

Nicol Stephen, Deputy First Minister & Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Scottish Executive

Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Welsh Assembly Government

Maria Eagle, Minister with responsibility for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland

## INTRODUCTION

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published a consultation document *Improving the Higher Education Applications Process* on 9 September 2005. The consultation exercise ended on 5 December 2005. Its purpose was to seek views on proposals intended to improve the efficiency and fairness of the current applications to higher education (HE) process for all students and to offer options for a system of post-qualification applications.

The work leading to the publication of the consultation document focused initially on the timing of application arrangements for learners who apply via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to enter higher education (HE) in the year in which they take their final school or Further Education (FE) qualifications, paying particular attention to those students whose HE choice is dependent on the results of exams which they have not yet taken. The proposals therefore focused largely on those learners, but also embraced the needs of all prospective HE students, including those who already have the qualifications they need to enter HE, part-time students, post-graduates, those taking vocational qualifications which may not meet the HE entry timetable, and overseas non-EU students. It was recognised that the issue of over-subscription could not be resolved by this exercise; rather it aimed to create a system promoting the best possible match between students and places.

190 responses were received. In addition a small number of responses were received after the deadline. Whilst not included in the statistical analysis, the comments made by those respondents were taken into account when formulating the response to the consultation. Throughout this response to the consultation exercise, percentages are expressed as a measure of those answering each question, not as a measure of all respondents.

The organisational breakdown of respondents was as follows:

HE Institution	98	Student Union	4
HE Representative Body	13	Schools Representative Body	4
HE Workforce Representative	12	Equality & Diversity Organisation	4
Other	11	Awarding/Examining Body	3
Schools and Sixth Form Colleges	10	FE Workforce Representative	2
Other Trade Union	6	LEA	2
FE Representative Body	6	FE & HE Funding Organisation	2
Students and Parents	6	School Workforce Representative	1
FE College	5	Other Government Department	1

The following pages give a summary of the responses to each proposal and recommend how they should be taken forward. One of our later recommendations is for the establishment of a Delivery Partnership to direct and oversee implementation of our recommendations for reform. The work of the Delivery Partnership is referred to throughout this document, with the main discussion being found in the response to Question 17.

## **Proposal 1**

**UCAS to continue their work to encourage the provision of clear, comparable entry requirement information, with a view to moving toward 100% provision of information for students wishing to enter HE in 2008/09.**

### **Do you agree?**

There were 159 responses to this proposal.

Yes 157 (99%)

No 0 (0%)

Not Sure 2 (1%)

### **Background**

We believe that the provision of clear, accurate entry requirement information is vital to enable all students to target their applications effectively. Better information and guidance is key to enabling students to make the choices that are right for them. The provision of this information could be particularly useful for those students who lack the confidence to apply for HE, for example, those from a background with no tradition of HE or for those following non-traditional or vocational routes into HE. The facility to see the level of achievement of those accepted onto courses in previous years may act as an encouragement for those students particularly.

### **Government response**

We are pleased that this proposal received widespread support. There was support for the use of HEI Entry Profiles on the UCAS website and some suggestions that these should be of a standard format to assist students researching their options and that they could be regulated by a code of practice. They should include reference to vocational pathways, where appropriate. Many students may also look for flexible offers of HE e.g. courses that are part-time and that are close to home or work, allowing an integration of work experience and scholarly study. Some respondents believed that careful consideration must be given to the amount of information supplied so that applicants were not overwhelmed. Many respondents highlighted a need for more investment of time and resources in the quality of information available to potential students, their families and advisers.

The Green Paper, Youth Matters, makes proposals for improving information, advice and guidance (IAG) for young people in England and the development of quality standards covering the provision and commissioning IAG. The Department for Education and Skills will be consulting on the development of these standards, which it expects to publish in April 2007.

In Wales, Extending Entitlement set out the development of improved information advice and guidance for young people aged 11-25 aimed at maximising the opportunities and choices for all young people.

A cross-Government review of IAG services for adults is underway in England, led by the DfES. It will publish its findings before the end of 2006, proposing a business plan for a more comprehensive and flexible system of support and referral, including encouraging progression to HE.

We recommend that this proposal is implemented by UCAS, in collaboration with the higher education institutions (HEIs), with regard being made to these comments and developments that are underway.



## **Proposal 2**

**In the context of the end-to-end review of student finance delivery in England, further consideration to be given to how to realise the principle of giving students researching their possible HE applications easy access to timely, accurate and reliable information, preferably in one place, about all the financial support they may receive whilst in HE.**

### **Do you agree?**

There were 156 responses to this proposal.

Yes 154 (99%)

No 1 (0.5%)

Not Sure 1 (0.5%)

#### **Background**

We believe that lack of information about the financial support on offer could be an issue for many students, particularly those from lower socio-economic groups. To counter this it was proposed that work is undertaken to produce clear, reliable information which is easily accessible, to inform potential students of their likely entitlement to financial assistance. A lack of such information could be a profound disincentive for those whose life choices depend on financial constraints. We believe that clearer financial information, coupled with the clearer entry information already discussed, will enable students to make the choices that are right for them.

#### **Government response**

We are pleased that respondents supported this proposal. The Department for Education and Skills, in line with the recommendations of the end-to-end review of the student finance delivery system in England, is considering a number of initiatives in relation to this proposal, including:

- giving potential applicants to HE an on-line facility to obtain a personal estimate of their likely entitlement to statutory and bursary support. This would provide facilities over and above UCAS's existing bursary comparator tool;
- aligning the student finance application timetable with the UCAS timetable so that those potential students who want to, can obtain a more definite assessment of their entitlement at the time they are researching their possible HE applications; and
- rationalising sources of information, advice and guidance on student finance, establishing a clear identifiable source and brand for customers.

The DfES is discussing these initiatives with stakeholders such as the Student Loans Company and UCAS, but no decisions have yet been taken on implementation.

The Welsh Assembly Government is considering similar initiatives for Wales.

The Scottish Executive has recently given the go-ahead to learndirect scotland to start work on developing a national information service on learner funding (including funding for higher education students) and learndirect scotland expect to have this service up and running during summer 2006. It will provide a first-stop shop for those learners who currently do not know where to go for funding information, or want to find out what sort of funding is offered for a variety of courses before making a choice. The service will be used by front-line advisers and intermediaries, including those from voluntary and community organisations, on behalf of those learners who are reluctant to use helplines or approach colleges or other sources of information, and will signpost those wishing to take a higher education course to the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) who provide comprehensive funding information.

We recommend that the Delivery Partnership keep in touch with these developments.

### **Proposal 3**

**HEFCE to commission early research on how students and their advisers are using the information on the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website, to ensure it is meeting the needs of students and their advisers and to inform its further development from 2006.**

#### **Do you agree?**

There were 147 responses to this proposal.

Yes 132 (90%)

No 9 (6%)

Not Sure 6 (4%)

#### **Background**

This proposal was designed to improve the information available to all students. The early research that is suggested here will help ensure that sources of information that are designed to assist students fulfil that aim and develop accordingly. Research may indicate whether there are some groups who are less or more likely to access, and act on, the available information; such research will inform further development of the website.

#### **Government response**

We welcome the majority support for this proposal.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), on behalf of the four funding bodies, has provided a grant to the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University, to gather and analyse feedback from users of the TQI site during its initial years (from autumn 2004 to summer 2007). The initial work with users includes a series of focus groups with HE applicants and teachers/advisers, a survey of the latter, and analysis of the feedback provided directly to the site. The first substantive report on this work is due to be published in autumn 2006. HEFCE will be implementing changes to the site on an annual basis to respond to user feedback and ensure the site meets their needs. Changes for the summer 2006 release are currently being planned.

We welcome this work and will ask the Department to ensure that anonymized comments that have been made to the Department about the TQI site through this public consultation exercise will be passed to HEFCE to help inform the review and further development of the TQI site.

In Scotland, TQI is at a different stage of development and further work would be required before any recommendation can be made about its application in Scotland.

## **Proposal 4**

**HEIs to develop more informative letters to feed back to students, detailing particularly why their applications have been rejected.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 159 responses to this proposal.

Yes 78 (49%)

No 47 (30%)

Not Sure 34 (21%)

### **Background**

The aim of this proposal was to ensure as far as possible that all students have sufficient information to target their applications appropriately. Where a student receives a rejection it was felt that it would be particularly beneficial for the student, or their advisers, to understand the context of that refusal, for example, the grades normally achieved by a student entering that course.

### **Government response**

Responses to the consultation show that opinion on this proposal is divided. There was no argument against providing better feedback to students in principle; in fact many respondents felt that this was vital. However, concerns were raised that the more feedback that was expected, the higher the workload for institutions and, of even greater concern, the higher the risk of litigation. There is a fine balance that needs to be achieved: there is a widely held belief that over-simplified responses would be of limited value for the student and student advisers; there is also great concern that the requirement to provide detailed feedback would be administratively unworkable for those institutions that had courses that were largely over-subscribed.

Many respondents firmly believed that improved pre-entry information was vital here, as it would help students target applications more effectively, particularly those applying through non-traditional routes, and may therefore reduce the demand for individual feedback. A number of helpful suggestions were made that warrant further investigation by the Delivery Partnership:

- a) HEIs to provide feedback, but on request only;
- b) the development of generic codes or tick boxes from a range of options;
- c) a number of carefully graduated standard letters;
- d) online feedback through UCAS based on tick boxes.

We recommend that this proposal is implemented by the Delivery Partnership, with a view to developing a consistent level of feedback that would be available on demand to students and student advisers, would be more tailored to the individual applicant and would be used by all institutions. The Delivery Partnership will want to take account of the outcome of the QAA Consultation on Chapter 9 of the Admissions to HE Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards, which refers to feedback.

## **Proposal 5**

**Schools and colleges should not supply students' predicted exam results with their HE applications and these should play no part in HE admissions decisions.**

### **Do you agree?**

There were 162 responses to this proposal.

Yes 40 (25%)

No 86 (53%)

Not Sure 36 (22%)

### **Background**

This proposal was developed in response to concerns that predicted exam results are incorrect in 55% of cases<sup>1</sup> and that this could disadvantage some students.

### **Government response**

Opinion was divided on this proposal, with over half of all respondents indicating that schools and colleges should continue to supply predicted exam results with HE applications. The response from schools and FE Colleges was almost equally divided between no, yes and not sure, with some respondents preferring to keep them until a full PQA system could be introduced. HEIs were more significantly in favour of keeping predicted grades, but emphasised that they use a range of information, of which predicted grades form a valuable part. There was comment that, whilst predicted grades were inaccurate, they remained a useful tool for indicating the potential of a student that may not be adequately reflected in GCSE results and should remain available until other, more reliable, methods were identified. Predicted grades were also useful for students, as an aid to identifying where they may best place their applications.

Opinion in Scotland was more sharply divided with a significant majority of respondents opposed to this proposal. The importance of ensuring that predicted grades are based on robust evidence was highlighted. It was noted by some that around 90% of predictions were accurate to within one grade.

There was some support in principle for the removal of predicted grades, but this was coupled with concerns about the information that may be relied upon in their place. Concern was raised that reliance on AS results would shift the burden onto students to do well at an earlier stage in their schooling. Concerns were also raised that the use of other information may benefit those students who received better support throughout the application process.

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<sup>1</sup> Estimating the Reliability of Predicted Grades, UCAS, 2005

In response to the supplementary question (**Question 1**) about what other information could be supplied in place of predicted grades, a number of suggestions were made, including other intermediate results from vocational awards, GCSE results, AS results, unit grades, aptitude tests etc. However, concern was again expressed that the use of some alternative evidence could benefit those students with better access to support. Some respondents raised concerns over the proliferation and use of aptitude tests.

We remain, nevertheless, of the opinion that, in the interests of fairness, it should not be necessary to continue with predicted grades indefinitely as more and more reliable information about students becomes available. We therefore recommend that predicted grades remain as an aid to admissions in the short term while the other reforms are brought in, and that the sector-led Delivery Partnership reviews the situation after the first year of operation of the new system.

In 2004, UCAS and the Joint Council for Qualifications carried out a consultation, relating to qualifications offered in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, on whether to provide HEIs with unit grade information. As a result of that consultation they are looking to carry out a small scale pilot this year to trial the technical processes involved on the part of Awarding Bodies, UCAS and the institutions. It is intended to provide for 2007 entry a full-scale service of unit and unit grade information for all unit-based qualifications in the UCAS Tariff.

We recommend that the Delivery Partnership should explore what changes would need to be made for AS results to be included on the UCAS application form. We believe this would help towards levelling the playing field for applicants and therefore hope that a consistent approach can be reached. So we ask the Delivery Partnership to generate an expectation that AS results will be included in applications to HE. We recognise that this would entail significant change to the way in which some schools currently structure their A level programmes, although we understand that this might be a very small number of schools. We also recognise that some students may prefer not to declare their AS results, perhaps depending on whether they had accepted or declined the AS grade achieved. However, although we cannot determine what culture will develop as a result of our recommendation, our aim is for all available information about applicants to be included on the UCAS form. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has been asked to review the certification (cashing-in) rules for AS and A2 with a view to ensuring consistent practice and the Delivery Partnership will want to take into account the findings of that review.

We also recommend that students who have gained certification for completed units of vocational qualifications are able to include their unit results on their application. However, whilst the delivery of a significant proportion of vocational qualifications follows a pattern that could equate to an academic year, equally a considerable number follow a more flexible pattern, including roll on/roll off qualifications that involve the gathering of evidence of practice.

These do not always fit neatly into current timetables for application. It would therefore be an important aspect of further research on entry into HE via vocational qualifications to see whether or not these candidates are disadvantaged by the provision of interim outcomes.

We also recommend that work is undertaken by the Delivery Partnership to assess what other information would be appropriate to include on the UCAS application form that could show an applicant's potential, whilst maintaining consistency and fairness across the process and without increasing the burden on applicants through, for example, proliferating aptitude tests. The Delivery Partnership will wish to take due account of the work of the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Group, including any findings of the latter in relation to the use of admission and aptitude tests.

## ***Proposal 6***

**The Delivery Partnership to keep in touch with developments in the e-portfolio and investigate its potential role in the HE applications process.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 144 responses to this proposal.

Yes 104 (72%)

No 8 (6%)

Not Sure 32 (22%)

### **Background**

An up-to-date record of a student's achievement could be used by institutions to help inform admissions decisions. This would particularly benefit those students following a non-traditional route into HE and could be used in addition to, or in place of, traditional qualifications. The use of such a record could assist and encourage those students whose potential may not be easily discernible from traditional qualifications.

### **Government response**

A majority of respondents agreed that investigating the potential role of the e-portfolio in the HE application process was a good idea. However, concerns were raised that this may disadvantage those students who did not have access to sufficient support to enable them to successfully complete an e-portfolio. We recommend that the Delivery Partnership investigate the role of the e-portfolio and other developments, such as the use of ASDAN awards, with a view to implementation. Due regard should be given to any disadvantage that could arise, including for those who were not in school / college education at the point of application.



## **Proposal 7**

**Students to submit initial applications between the beginning of September and the end of March, either together or separately. HEIs should seek to respond to applications as speedily as is practicable.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 154 responses to this proposal.

Yes 64 (42%)

No 63 (41%)

Not Sure 27 (17%)

### **Background**

This proposal was based on the argument that an extended period for applying to HE would ensure that students had a better opportunity to fully research their options and have the time to develop their thinking about future career paths. This would be particularly beneficial for those students who are uncertain about their capabilities or preferences and for those who may not have previously considered higher education, but are encouraged by their performance during their final school year.

### **Government response**

Opinion on this proposal was evenly split. There was a wide variety of responses both from schools/FE colleges and from HEIs. There was concern that the September – March period was too long, leaving students uncertain for a longer period of time. There was some agreement that a later date could benefit students, particularly those who did not receive sufficient support and were inclined to apply late, but also concerns about students making or revising applications in February or March, during their preparations for the busy exam period. There were also issues around students making early applications that are ill-prepared and which they may wish to subsequently change. Some respondents felt that dealing with applications as and when they arrived would increase the sense of first-come, first-served and therefore did not encourage students to place well-researched applications, later in the period. There was a good deal of support for maintaining a gathered field of applicants, but a range of views over whether it should be earlier or later than proposed. Issues around those courses or subject areas that rely on portfolio work as part of the applications process would need to be addressed. From a student perspective, the deadline, rather than the opening date for applications, appeared to be the key issue.

Our recommendation here also addresses responses to **Question 3**, relating to whether a single response date should exist for all institutions. There were 135 responses to this question - Single date for all (49%), As now (33%) and Other (18%). Concerns were raised about the current perception of a two-tier system, which may be furthered by maintaining different deadlines and was perceived as inconsistent with equity across the system

as a whole. Many favoured a single date for the receipt of applications and supported the idea that HEIs should assess applicants on the basis of a gathered field.

However, there were also strong concerns that a single deadline of 15 January would not meet the needs of Oxbridge or courses such as Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science. The timing of assessing and interviewing applicants for these courses is such that applications need to be submitted by 15 October. It was also suggested that a single, later deadline of 15 January would involve potential risk for students applying for courses such as medicine, as those who were unsuccessful would not know that until after the single response date, by which time the vast majority of HE places would have been allocated on a conditional basis. So some highly capable students may find it difficult to obtain a place that they merit.

We recognise the validity of all the arguments expressed in response to Question 3, both for and against a single deadline. Whilst we believe that a single deadline date appears more likely to offer an equal chance for all students, we acknowledge that for those offering courses that are traditionally very high-demand, this would entail processing large volumes of applications and arranging interviews later in the year, at a stage when students need to focus on preparing for their exams. We do not wish to create additional pressure for applicants by moving an already demanding admissions process to the end of the spring term, just as applicants approach their final exams.

We therefore recommend maintaining the current deadline of 15 October for the time being, for the submission of applications for Oxbridge, Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science courses, and a deadline of 15 January for all other mainstream courses, as now. We do however believe that the introduction of the concept of a gathered field will bring benefits to those students who prefer to wait until later in the application period before applying. It is important that students are confident that any application they submit within the deadline will be considered fairly alongside other candidates. We therefore recommend that, in the case of both the 15 October and 15 January deadlines, applicants may submit their applications right up to the deadline date appropriate to their chosen course. HEIs will start the process of selecting applicants for consideration, as they do now, but no offers will be made before the deadline date. This will remove the temptation for students to submit early, ill-researched applications in the hope of securing an early offer.

That said, we recommend the Delivery Partnership continue discussions on the issue of deadline dates and re-visit the possibility of a single deadline date in light of the impact of the other reforms which we are recommending.

## Question 2

### Are you in favour of four or six initial applications?

There were 154 responses to this question.

Four 89 (58%)

Six 46 (30%)

Other 19 (12%)

#### Background

Many stakeholders, during preliminary discussions, suggested that the current process of allowing up to six applications was burdensome, particularly as many students' fifth and sixth applications were often poorly considered.

#### Government response

The response showed that a clear majority favoured a reduction from 6 applications to 4. Some saw this as a way of reducing over and under-subscription to courses, as students would target their applications more carefully. However, many valid concerns were raised about limiting student choice and the disadvantage that could arise. Our recommendation here addresses those concerns (in conjunction with Proposal 8), whilst gaining some efficiency advantage for institutions. Improved information, advice and guidance should give applicants a better chance of making confident and realistic assessment of their chances of obtaining a place at a certain institution by matching their abilities to the academic and other aspects of the course.

We recommend that a reduction to 5 initial applications is introduced and that the initial application round would be followed by a further period of activity, based on the current UCAS Extra process, that would ensure that students had the opportunity to continue applying for places, if unsuccessful with their five initial applications (see Proposal 8). We do not propose that there is any change to the current limit of four applications to Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary courses. Students who were unsuccessful in applying to these courses would be able to make a further application in the mainstream system.

We further recommend that the Delivery Partnership monitors what impact the reduction of initial applications has on applicants and considers whether a possible further reduction to 4 applications in the longer term would be beneficial and whether any change would subsequently be required for applications to Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary courses. The Delivery Partnership should look into the possibility of linking this with the UCAS research exploring the reasons for around 100,000 students annually applying to UCAS but leaving the system without securing a place.

### **Proposal 8**

**Students who receive no offers from their initial applications to be able to submit an unlimited number of additional applications, one at a time, until they secure an offer, up to the end of June.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 152 responses to this proposal.

Yes 116 (76%)

No 21 (14%)

Not Sure 15 (10%)

#### **Background**

This proposal attempts to ensure that as many students as possible gain the offer of a place before results are published. This is particularly important to engage those students early on who may otherwise decide not to participate in the applications process, or who would otherwise only apply after they had received their results, when the majority of places had already been allocated.

#### **Government response**

This proposal received wide support. There were, however, a number of concerns raised about whether this facility should be limited, as there was a danger that students could make numerous, ill-researched applications in a desperate bid to secure a HE place, irrespective of the suitability of that place. We recommend that this proposal is implemented by the Delivery Partnership. But, in order to enable institutions to plan effectively, we also recommend that students are required to respond to any offers within a fixed timescale and that further thought be given to whether a maximum number of applications is appropriate, in the light of experience of student behaviour.

## **Proposal 9**

**HEIs to publish monthly vacancy lists, from the end of March until the end of Clearing.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 147 responses to this proposal.

Yes 102 (69%)

No 25 (17%)

Not Sure 20 (14%)

### **Background**

This proposal was developed to assist those students who failed to identify a suitable HE course early on in the process. Clear information detailing where opportunities exist would help students target their applications effectively. This may also benefit those students who had delayed applying to HE due to lack of confidence; the publication of vacancy lists may act as an incentive to those students to apply once they had received their results.

### **Government response**

The majority of respondents agreed with this proposal. Respondents saw this as a good idea that built on existing practice and suggestions were made on how this proposal could be improved. Many respondents suggested that monthly vacancy lists were not sufficient and that HEIs should publish information more frequently and that the information could be held in one place e.g. on the UCAS website. We recommend that this proposal is implemented by the Delivery Partnership, taking into account the suggestions for greater frequency and possible improvement and that the facility should commence as soon as reasonably practicable after the deadline of 15 January.

### ***Proposal 10***

**HEIs to continue their work to ensure against unfair competition for places between pre-qualified and other home and EU students.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 146 responses to this proposal.

Yes 133 (91%)

No 6 (4%)

Not Sure 7 (5%)

### ***Proposal 11***

**HEIs to continue to consider applications from pre-qualified overseas non-EU students as they do now and, where appropriate, offer them places on an unconditional basis.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 146 responses to this proposal.

Yes 130 (90%)

No 8 (5%)

Not Sure 8 (5%)

#### **Background**

On considering the current system for admitting overseas and pre-qualified students it became clear that institutions already have mechanisms in place to ensure against unfair competition for places between overseas, pre-qualified and other home and EU students.

#### **Government response**

In light of the broad agreement with these findings we recommend that institutions continue their work in these areas. It will be necessary to consider any possible implications for recruitment of overseas students flowing from the reforms proposed.

## **Proposal 12**

**Students to continue to hold up to two offers.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 151 responses to this proposal.

Yes 93 (62%)

No 35 (23%)

Not Sure 23 (15%)

### **Background**

Initial consideration of the insurance choice suggested that the holding open of a second choice was unduly burdensome for institutions. However, concerns were raised about the disadvantage and insecurity that some students would suffer, should that second choice be removed. It was therefore proposed that the insurance choice would remain.

### **Government response**

The majority of respondents agreed that the insurance choice should remain. It was felt that taking away the insurance offer could put far more students into Clearing where they faced a more uncertain future, and would be more likely to make less informed decisions, in the heat of the moment. On balance we believe that students should continue to be able to hold up to two offers. This could be revisited in light of changes to student behaviour flowing from the reforms recommended.

#### **Question 4**

**Should students who hold only one offer following their initial applications be allowed to submit additional applications until they gain a second offer?**

There were 146 responses to this question.

Yes 75 (51%)

No 52 (36%)

Not Sure 19 (13%)

#### **Background**

The background to Proposal 8 was a desire to ensure that as many students as possible gained an offer of a place before results were published. The majority of respondents agreed with that proposal and we have recommended that it is taken forward. Question 4 built on Proposal 8. It asked whether those students who continue to seek places after the initial deadline has passed should be placed in the same position as their peers who have managed to secure a firm choice and an insurance choice. It was felt that, in the interests of equity, if respondents agreed to maintain the insurance choice, then all students should have as much opportunity as possible of gaining a second offer.

#### **Government response**

Just over half of all respondents thought that students who held only one offer following their initial applications should be allowed to submit additional applications until they gained a second offer. Whilst increasing the workload for admissions staff, it would offer parity with students who received two offers in the initial round. It would facilitate choice and accessibility for students. We therefore recommend that this is implemented by the Delivery Partnership.



### ***Proposal 13***

**Students holding two offers to continue to rank them as first firm and insurance choices.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 146 responses to this proposal.

Yes 123 (85%)

No 15 (10%)

Not Sure 8 (5%)

#### **Background**

The work that led to the publication of the consultation document included considering alternatives to the current system, where students hold up to two offers, which are ranked in order of preference. Whilst there may be some advantage in allowing students to hold open as many offers as they are able to secure, it was acknowledged that that would create an unmanageable burden on higher education institutions. Maintaining the status quo was therefore proposed, because it does have the advantage of affording the student an element of security.

#### **Government response**

There was widespread support for maintaining the status quo, and therefore we recommend that this process continues.

### ***Proposal 14***

**Students who achieve higher grades than required by their conditional offers to be able to make a new application and have their original first firm conditional offer protected whilst they do so.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 155 responses to this proposal.

Yes 82 (53%)                      No 51 (33%)                      Not Sure 22 (14%)

### ***Proposal 15***

**A confirmation and new application round to be run ahead of Clearing.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 149 responses to this proposal.

Yes 58 (39%)                      No 61 (41%)                      Not Sure 30 (20%)

#### **Background**

These two proposals were developed to benefit those students who had accepted offers based on grades that proved to be an underestimation. There is currently little opportunity for those students who achieve higher grades than required by their offer to seek an alternative place that best suits their personal circumstances and aspirations. Taken together, these proposals open up the opportunity of seeking an offer that best meets their aspirations, whilst maintaining the security of keeping open the offer they already hold.

#### **Government response**

Consultation respondents generally welcomed the principle of allowing students who had achieved higher grades than required by their conditional offers to make a fresh application for a place that better matched their exam performance (Proposal 14). But there was scepticism about the confirmation and new applications round that was proposed to achieve this (Proposal 15). The key difficulties were felt to be that the round would be complicated and confusing. It was unclear how it would work in practice, making institutional numbers planning very difficult.

We believe that the improvements to the availability and accessibility of pre-application information will help students choose the right course for them in the first place. Applicants make decisions on where to apply, and subsequently which offer to accept, based on a number of different factors, not solely based on their expected exam results.

However, we strongly believe that the opportunity to make fresh applications will offer genuine advantages of fairness to those students who achieve higher grades than required by their conditional offers.

We do not intend to create a system in which there is very high demand for a small number of places. We acknowledge that exam results are only one of several factors that determine which place a student takes up. For us, the likely consequence of this is that few students will want to change their first firm conditional offer, even if they achieve higher grades than required. Some will, as now, opt to take a gap-year and re-apply, as pre-qualified students, in the following year.

We are also clear that some high demand courses which are already over-subscribed are unlikely to have many vacancies for new, post exam results, applications. For some courses it may not be possible to consider new applications at this stage (for example where interviews and/or CRB checks are mandatory or admissions tests are undertaken as part of the selection process). Students will therefore need to consider carefully where to place any new application. Many courses, however, may welcome interest from candidates who have re-appraised their choices in light of their exam results.

We recommend that the Delivery Partnership introduces a facility for students who achieve higher grades than required by their first firm conditional offer to make a fresh application, should they wish. For us, this facility should deliver the following principles:

- those who achieve higher grades than required by their first firm conditional offer should have the chance to make a fresh application for an alternative place;
- the first firm conditional offers of the above group should be protected whilst they make their new application (i.e. if their new application is unsuccessful, they will still be able to take up their first firm conditional offer);
- all new applications from these students should be considered in a gathered field alongside those candidates who have missed the grades of their first firm conditional offer but still hope to take it up (the near misses);
- the insurance offers of this latter group (those who have missed the grades of their first firm conditional offer) should be protected whilst HEIs are considering whether to offer them their first firm conditional offer;
- all this activity (including final confirmation of which places students want to take up) should be completed before Clearing starts.
- the facility should be time-limited, in order to avoid unduly delaying the start of Clearing

#### **Post-Qualification Adjustment period**

One way in which these principles might be realised is the introduction of a post-qualification adjustment period. This could take place immediately after

exam results are published and before Clearing starts and could operate broadly on the following lines:

- This is a time-limited application round, which begins after results are published and completes before Clearing starts.
- The round will be created in the time freed up by moving the publication of exam results forward (one week, at least, is envisaged).
- Students who had achieved the grades of their first firm conditional offer (CF) offer could confirm that they wanted to take up this offer. Any insurance offers that this group held would become vacancies.
- Other students who had achieved higher grades than required by their CF offer could choose to protect that offer whilst they made one application for an alternative place (any insurance offers they held would become vacancies).
- Students who had missed the grades of their CF offer could indicate to the HEI that they still wished to be considered as a 'near miss' in the hope of being accepted, whilst protecting their insurance offer, or they could choose to accept their insurance offer.
- HEIs would consider all new applications, alongside all the 'near misses'. They could fill any vacancies made available as a result of unneeded insurance offers (see third and fourth bullets above);
- Decisions and confirmations would be made by the end of this period.
- Clearing would start immediately after this.

The Delivery Partnership will need to look more closely into how this adjustment period will work in practice. We acknowledge that operating a time-limited round ahead of Clearing will mean that some students will be required to wait until the Clearing process begins before they can submit applications. We anticipate though that the number of students needing to enter Clearing will continue to fall, particularly in light of the reforms that we are recommending which should enable the majority of students to secure an offer before they receive their exam results. We believe that a short delay for some students would be outweighed by the advantages that this new round will bring.

We further recommend that the Delivery Partnership evaluate student behaviour following the implementation of this proposal to assess the volume of new applications made in the post-qualification adjustment round, the impact this has on HEIs and changes in the use of insurance choices.

## ***Proposal 16***

**The two route application system for Art and Design to be replaced by a single application system which retains sequential applications and an opening date for applications at the beginning of September and a closing date in late March.**

### **Do you agree?**

There were 122 responses to this proposal.

Yes 78 (64%)

No 12 (10%)

Not Sure 32 (26%)

### **Background**

Two application routes for art and design currently exist. Opinions were expressed that the two routes can cause confusion for students and student advisers alike. This proposal was designed to simplify the application process, whilst maintaining its benefits.

### **Government response**

The majority of respondents agreed that the two route application for Art and Design should be replaced by a single application system. Respondents did however raise concerns about the need for balance between offering flexibility for students and allowing institutions sufficient time to conduct selection. Respondents also noted that students needed sufficient time to build up an acceptable portfolio of work. By agreeing a later deadline than exists in the main application system, some students may suffer disadvantage if they were to fail to gain a place from their 5 initial applications to Art and Design and subsequently enter the proposed UCAS Extra type facility later than other students.

We recommend that this proposal is implemented by the Delivery Partnership, in collaboration with the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design, matching the number of applications to that of the mainstream applications process, but paying regard to the potential need for a later closing date of March due to the preparation of portfolio work.

### **Proposal 17**

**Clearing to operate on the basis of three consecutive application rounds in which students submit one application in each round.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 147 responses to this proposal.

Yes 51 (35%)

No 72 (49%)

Not Sure 24 (16%)

#### **Background**

Clearing currently operates on a first-come, first-served basis, which can act to the detriment of those students who have not received sufficient guidance to enable them to target their applications successfully, or who do not have the confidence to apply to HE until late in the day. This proposal would ensure that all students are considered alongside each other and remove the disadvantage associated with having to make quick, potentially un-researched, applications. It also removes the unfairness associated with allocating places on a first-come, first-served basis, which may result in less qualified students receiving places ahead of better qualified students, simply because their application was received earlier.

#### **Government response**

The majority of respondents did not agree that Clearing should operate on the basis of three consecutive application rounds in which students submitted one application in each round. The proposal was seen to be cumbersome and excessively complicated. In addition, our other recommendations should lead to fewer applicants needing to enter Clearing. We therefore recommend that the current continuous process remains in place. As we do not recommend changes to the current continuous system of Clearing, **Question 6** relating to timescales for a system based on 3 consecutive rounds becomes irrelevant.

## **Proposal 18**

**The results of AS, A levels, Highers and Advanced Highers to be published at least one week earlier than at present.**

**Do you agree?**

There were 152 responses to this proposal.

Yes 121 (80%)

No 11 (7%)

Not Sure 20 (13%)

### **Background**

This proposal was developed solely to free up time to enable a fairer and more efficient applications process to take place. It does not impact on teaching or learning time. It will however allow students longer to secure a HE place before the start of term and will therefore have a positive impact on all students.

### **Government response**

The consultation document proposed bringing forward the date on which A levels, Highers and Advanced Highers are published to students by one week by giving results to students at the same time as they are released to HEIs. This proposal was warmly welcomed and many respondents argued that it did not go far enough. Many of the respondents who welcomed the proposal of an earlier publication date, did however raise concerns about the impact on HEIs, if they were to receive the results at the same time as students. In doing so, HEIs would lose their opportunity to process the majority of offers prior to the exam results being published to students.

We therefore recommend that, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Awarding Bodies and the regulators seek to bring forward the publication of A level results to students by one week and to continue to issue those results to HEIs up to a week before they go to students. This will need to be done, of course, without risking safe delivery of A level results.

The results of Scottish Highers are currently published one week earlier than A level results. A move to an earlier publication date to students in Scotland would create particular difficulties because of the earlier summer holiday period in Scotland. We therefore recommend that, in Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) should be asked to bring forward results to HE institutions by one week but to continue to issue results to students as at present. This would standardise the publication of results throughout the UK and it would create more time for students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland between the receipt of results and the start of the HE term. HEIs would continue to see results before students received them, so that they could start on processing and decision making in advance of approaches from applicants.

We are recommending that the Awarding Bodies and regulators seek to deliver A level results to students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland one week earlier than they do currently. It will of course be important that students have access to relevant information, advice and guidance (IAG) from the time they receive their results. However, if we bring publication of exam results forward this could raise issues in some cases about the availability of teachers to provide such advice. We therefore further recommend that the Delivery Partnership includes representatives from the school workforce unions so that the impact on the school workforce is one of the issues that is considered, alongside the findings of the Awarding Bodies and regulators. We believe that the new arrangements for providing IAG to young people in England will help to find workable solutions should this problem arise. Similarly, we do not anticipate any insurmountable problems in Wales or Northern Ireland.



### ***Proposal 19***

**Work to be undertaken to look at what might be done to inform those taking non A level qualifications, whose timetables it is not feasible to bring in line with the HE admissions cycle, of the requirements of that cycle, with the aim of allowing them, where possible and appropriate, to timetable their learning and accreditation accordingly.**

#### **Do you agree?**

There were 143 responses to this proposal.

Yes 130 (91%)                      No 2 (1%)                      Not Sure 11 (8%)

### ***Proposal 20***

**Work to be started now with the express purpose of ensuring that, by 2008/09, the results of non A level portfolio based qualifications are published earlier than they are at present.**

#### **Do you agree?**

There were 138 responses to this question.

Yes 120 (87%)                      No 3 (2%)                      Not Sure 15 (11%)

#### **Background**

Many non-A level qualifications are undertaken routinely as a route into employment rather than HE. However, some students may wish to use their qualifications to access HE and these proposals were developed to remove any disadvantage for those students that may occur due to lack of information about the HE timetable or due to receiving results at a later date than A level students. The phased introduction of the new 14-19 specialised Diplomas from September 2008 onwards will mean that people will be approaching HE institutions with new qualifications. The Diplomas are being designed to offer progression to HE and will reflect a mix of both general and vocational learning and may well include GCSEs and GCEs as well as vocational qualifications.

#### **Government response**

There was widespread support for the equality and fairness that both of these proposals would bring. We acknowledge the scale of this challenge, but recommend that the Delivery Partnership pursue both proposals, in close collaboration with the Awarding Bodies offering both specialised Diplomas and other vocational qualifications and with regard to the outcomes of research into vocational progression, to ensure that the needs of those taking vocational qualifications are properly understood and safeguarded.

### **Question 17**

**Do you support the proposals made (in Chapter 9 of the consultation document) for a Delivery Partnership to lead implementation of reform to the applications system, supported by a Stakeholders Advisory Forum?**

There were 133 responses to this question.

Yes 102 (77%)

No 20 (15%)

Not Sure 11 (8%)

#### **Background**

The implementation of any reform of the HE applications system would require co-operation and collaboration between the key stakeholders throughout the system. It is not the Government's role to impose or to be primarily responsible for implementing change. Strong arguments were made that such a complex and far-reaching programme of reform is unlikely to be successful if it is left to develop in a wholly piecemeal fashion. The establishment of a sector-led Delivery Partnership to direct and oversee implementation was therefore proposed.

#### **Government response**

We recognise that ultimately it is for the education sector to decide how to take these recommendations forward. We are pleased at the level of support for a sector-led Delivery Partnership.

The Schwartz review of admissions to HE recommended that a central source of expertise and advice on admissions issues should be created. In response, a programme of work is being developed by a sector-led body with UK-wide membership which offers a potential model for the structure of the Delivery Partnership. The Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) programme will lead on the continuing development of fair admissions, bring together and evaluate existing research as well as commissioning new research, and encourage identification and organise dissemination of effective practice. The Steering Group has already identified that there will be a clear link between the work of the SPA programme and the developments recommended in this response.

We recognise that there will be an overlap of interests between the SPA programme and the work that the Delivery Partnership will be tasked with delivering. We believe that the Delivery Partnership will be a separate entity, but that it is likely that there will be common membership between the two groups and that there will be effective links between the two groups as the work progresses.

We recommend that the Delivery Partnership is established rapidly. It is vital that the Delivery Partnership includes representatives from across all four parts of the United Kingdom and that any changes are supported by all, if the unified application system is to be maintained.

## BEYOND 2008/09

### Towards a System of Post-Qualification Applications

In the consultation, we described the concept of PQA and ways in which it could operate. The principles that PQA could deliver were outlined. These were:

- fairness to students;
- open and transparent decisions;
- creating best possible match between students' aspirations, their merit and the places available;
- administrative efficiency for HEIs and of the system as a whole.

Specifically we put forward two options (A and B) exploring how each might work. The response to each option is summarised below.

#### **Question: Do you support Option A?**

There were 144 responses to this question.

Yes 22 (15%)

No 97 (68%)

Not Sure 25 (17%)

#### **Background**

This Option consisted of a two-stage approach, comprising a pre-results registration phase and a post-results application phase.

#### **Comment**

This option commanded very little support. 26% of respondents said that Option A was unworkable and 14% said that this option would make planning impossible.

#### **Question: Do you support Option B**

There were 147 responses to this question.

Yes 35 (24%)

No 78 (53%)

Not Sure 34 (23%)

#### **Background**

This Option also consisted of a two-stage approach, which preserved some elements of the current applications system. Here, some places would be offered before results and some would be reserved until afterwards.

## **Comment**

There was minority support for Option B. Many felt that it was preferable to Option A, but, again, the system was felt to be too complicated to implement at this time. Some noted that it offered few advantages over the current system.

The soundings taken prior to the consultation exercise, and the views expressed in response to it, identified a number of practical difficulties with moving in the short term to a PQA approach. At the same time though, both before and during the consultation exercise, very strong support in principle for PQA was voiced. It was widely felt to be the most effective way of delivering a fair and efficient approach to applications.

## **Government Response**

We therefore recommend that the Delivery Partnership gathers further evidence on the practical obstacles to, and benefits of, PQA. It should take it as its challenge to find ways of circumventing the former in order to realise the latter.

It will be important that this work is carried out in the light of experience of our recommended reforms for 2008/09. Some of the key questions the Delivery Partnership will need to consider in this connection will include:

- the number of initial applications students make: what impact the reduction to five has on student behaviour; what impact the reduction has on HEIs of different types/with different missions; whether there is scope for further reduction;
- the role and use of predicted grades post 2008/09: the extent to which they continue to be used; the purpose to which they are put; the influence they have on admissions decisions; whether they provide additional insights into other available information and whether these insights could be gained in another way;
- the role and use of AS and other intermediate results in the applications process: the extent to which they are declared by students and used by HEIs; the purpose for which HEIs use them; their influence on and usefulness to admissions decisions;
- the impact of increasing numbers of students applying to HE with vocational qualifications;
- the impact of the availability of results of level 3 specialised Diplomas, the first of which are due to be available by 2010;
- behaviour of under-graduates at the end of their first year: to what extent do they change courses; to what extent is this behaviour 'masked' by it happening within rather than between institutions; to what extent are under-graduates changing courses at the end of their first year or repeating that first year and to what extent is this of value or a waste of

time and money for under-graduates; to what extent does an end of first year change of course represent an optimal learning outcome for under-graduates; what relationship is there between end of first year change of course and drop out; what administrative burdens does end of first year change place on HEIs; to what extent could issues raised by end of first year change be avoided by PQA applications;

- the barriers faced by those students who apply but do not get into HE: what evidence is available; what does this suggest about the applications process after 2008/09; what advantages might the move to PQA offer; what key characteristics or process elements will the PQA system need to have to deal with the issues faced by this group of students. UCAS is undertaking research into those applicants who fail to take up a HE place and that research could usefully feed into these findings.

Alongside considering the above questions, the Delivery Partnership will also take account of the timing and implementation of the range of developments that will happen over the coming years that will bear on HE admissions and facilitate PQA. Some of these should offer advantages in terms of creating additional time between the publication of exam results and the start of the HE term and thus the time available to run a PQA type application facility. These developments will include:

- Increasing electronic of HE applications process. More and more applicants are choosing to make and monitor the progress of their HE applications electronically. Over time, HEIs are developing increasingly sophisticated IT systems, allowing them to consider and respond to applications electronically. The UCAS system is evolving, joining up these two 'traffic flows' and increasingly facilitating an online applications process. These developments offer the potential for a more efficient and quicker applications process that should, in time, contribute significantly to delivering PQA type approaches in the limited time available in summer.
- A level reform. Under plans announced in the 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper, the six modules that currently make up A levels will be reduced to four. This may reduce the time required for marking and moderation, and allow for more effective timetabling of exams. These changes along with potential improvements to the Awarding Body processes around marking and moderation may enable A level results to be published earlier than they are now and possibly earlier than under the 2008/09 changes.

Taken together, the above could offer the potential time savings in summer to facilitate PQA type approaches. But it may also be that moves towards fuller PQA depend on further significant reforms such as those debated but ruled out by other groups which have sought in the past to find ways to implement PQA through, for example, changes to the start of the first HE term for under-graduates.

Very many stakeholders have emphasised the possibly intractable difficulties, implications and effects of such significant change. They have also noted that change may have adverse impacts on those students who do not plan to go to HE. Further, specialised Diplomas, which will provide learners with a new progression route to HE, will start to be introduced from 2008 and be fully operational from 2013. It will be crucial that any future changes to the HE applications process do not disadvantage applicants seeking admission with these, or indeed any type, of vocational qualifications, nor should they disadvantage mature students, those who seek to enter HE on a part-time basis, or those whose course of study may start at different times of the academic year. We and key stakeholders will obviously need to be clear that the benefits of any proposed further steps towards PQA that impact on the above areas outweigh their potential disadvantages before they are taken.

## **Scotland**

In Scotland, as indicated elsewhere in this response, the position is significantly different from that in other parts of the UK. The majority of school pupils sit the examinations which qualify them for entrance into HE (Highers) at the end of their fifth year of secondary school and many then stay on for a further year at school. This means that for many (around 70%), PQA is already a reality. The case for significant system change in Scotland may therefore be less compelling and Scottish Ministers will take fully into account the particular circumstances and requirements of Scottish education before deciding whether any further changes beyond those proposed in this response are required in future.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

We believe that the changes which we are recommending the Delivery Partnership implement for applications to HE for the academic year 2008/09 will deliver a system that is fairer for students and more efficient for HEIs. The flowcharts annexed to this document illustrate the changes to the system.

Our recommendations will:

- make it easier for students to understand the entry requirements of the courses available;
- provide more and better information on which HEIs can base their admissions decisions;
- involve students submitting, and HEIs considering, fewer initial applications, thereby reducing administrative burdens;
- ensure applications are considered on the basis of a gathered field, creating a more equal chance for all students and reducing the temptation for them to place early, ill-researched applications;
- give students better feedback on their applications, allowing them to make better informed decisions about their HE options;
- give those who have failed to gain an offer with their initial applications better opportunities to continue applying in search of a place;

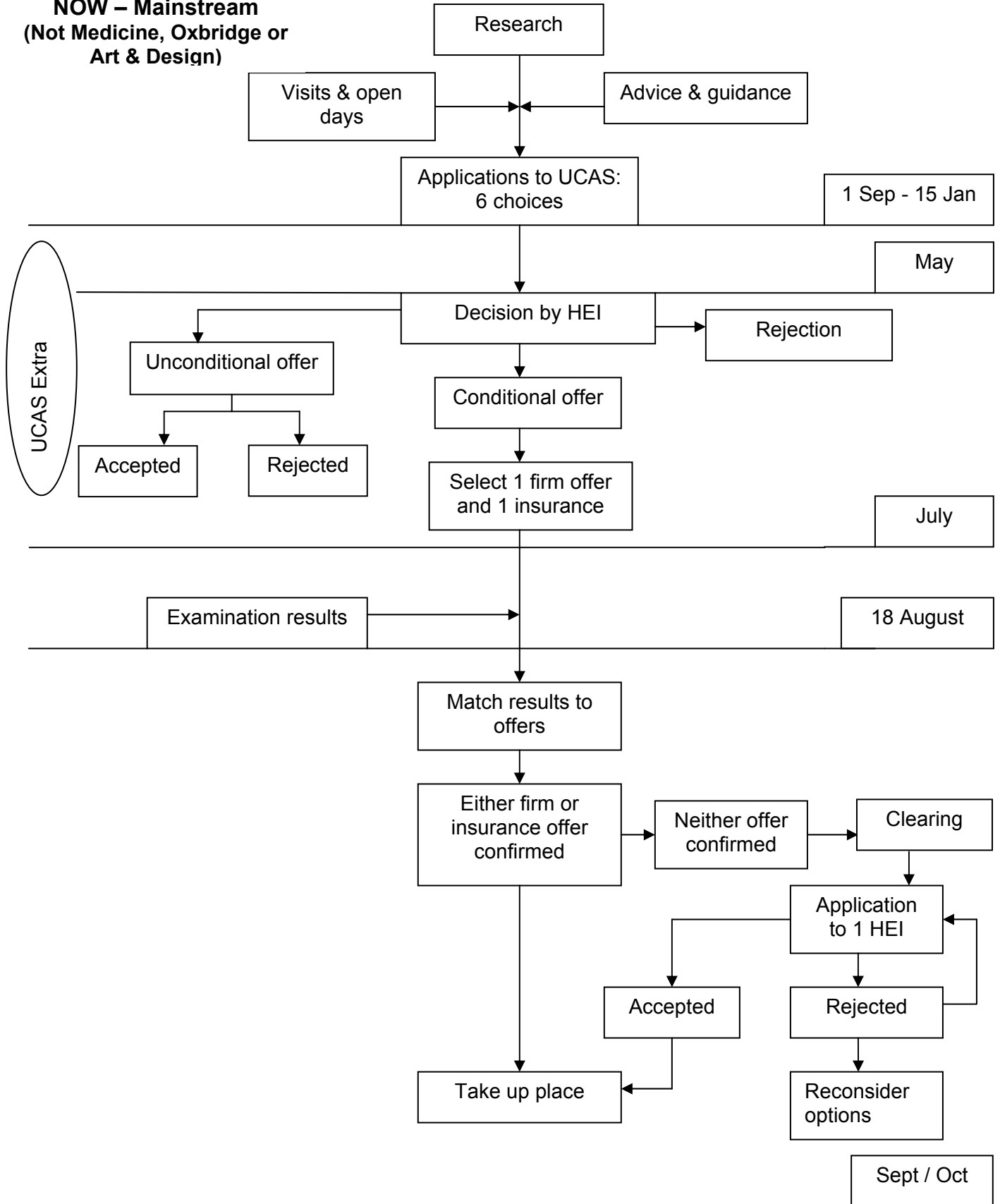
- result in fewer students needing to enter Clearing; and
- offer those students who have achieved higher grades than required by their first firm conditional offer the chance to seek an alternative place that best matches their aspirations and circumstances.

Our recommended changes for 2008/09 will provide some of the key advantages associated with the principles of PQA. They strike a balance between the interests of students and of institutions and represent a valuable step forward in a continuing journey towards fairer applications. They will realise some of the key benefits of PQA and lay strong foundations for possible further steps in that direction.

But, it is clear that a great deal of work remains to resolve the practical difficulties associated with PQA. Much of this work cannot take place until the reforms that are recommended for 2008/09 have had some time to bed down and have their impact assessed. Some work is needed to take account of developments that will not be fully implemented for some years yet. It is clear that some very real difficulties remain to be overcome before further steps towards full PQA can be taken. So, we are clear that PQA is not going to happen overnight.

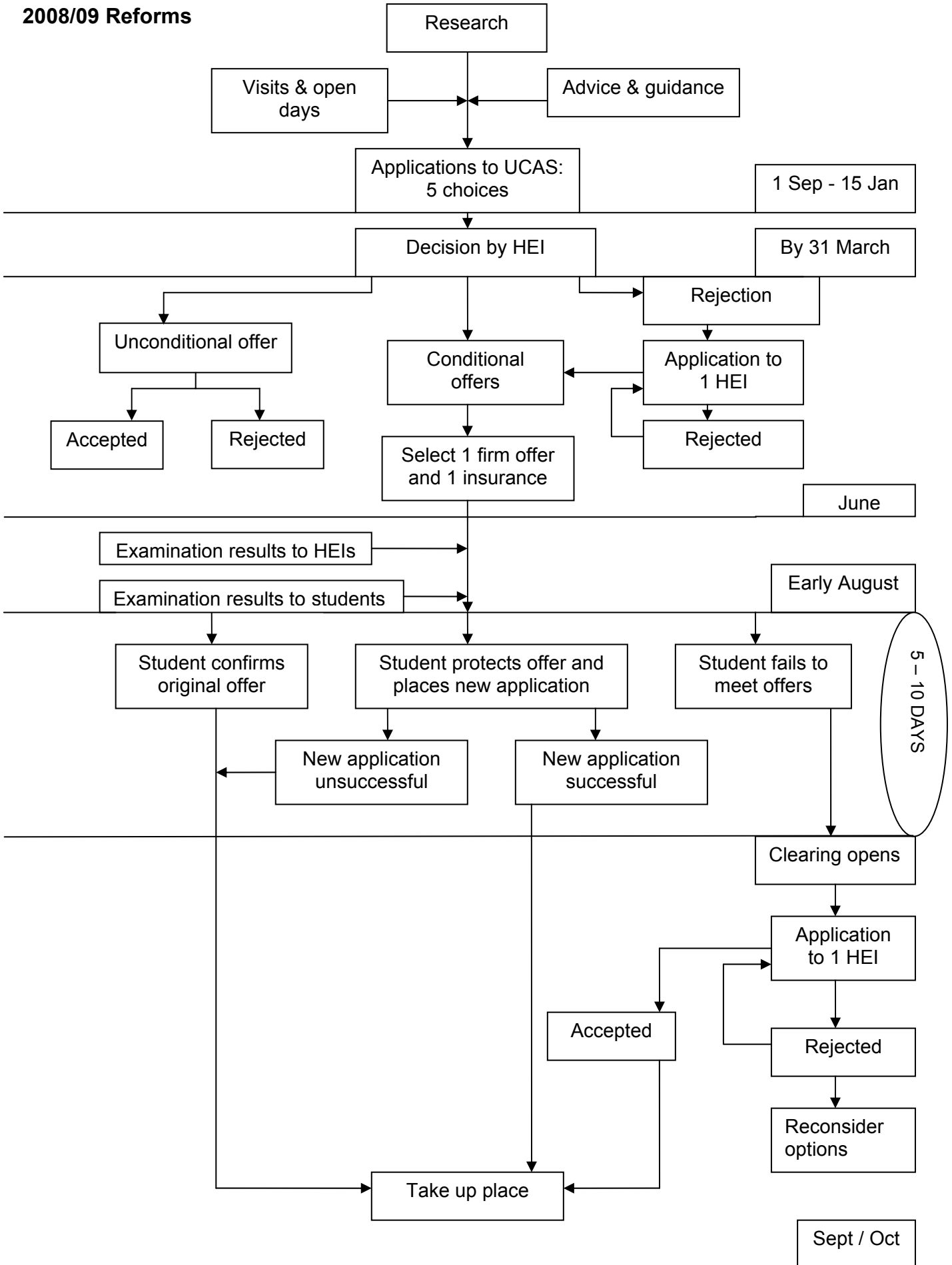
We believe that further improvements to the applications process will be possible after the proposed changes are implemented. Specifically, we reaffirm our belief in the principles underlying PQA, and note that the education sector is broadly committed to these. Building on progress of the work plan for 2008 - 2012 outlined above, we believe that if the sector is reassured on the following three points, that is, the progress made towards earlier publication of level 3 results, progress in widening participation and that the timing of higher education admission processes will not be detrimental to international applications, then it would be possible to move towards PQA by 2012. To this end we propose a further review in 2010/11. We believe that such a review should build consensus amongst key sector stakeholders and facilitate further progress towards PQA.

**NOW – Mainstream**  
 (Not Medicine, Oxbridge or  
 Art & Design)





**2008/09 Reforms**



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