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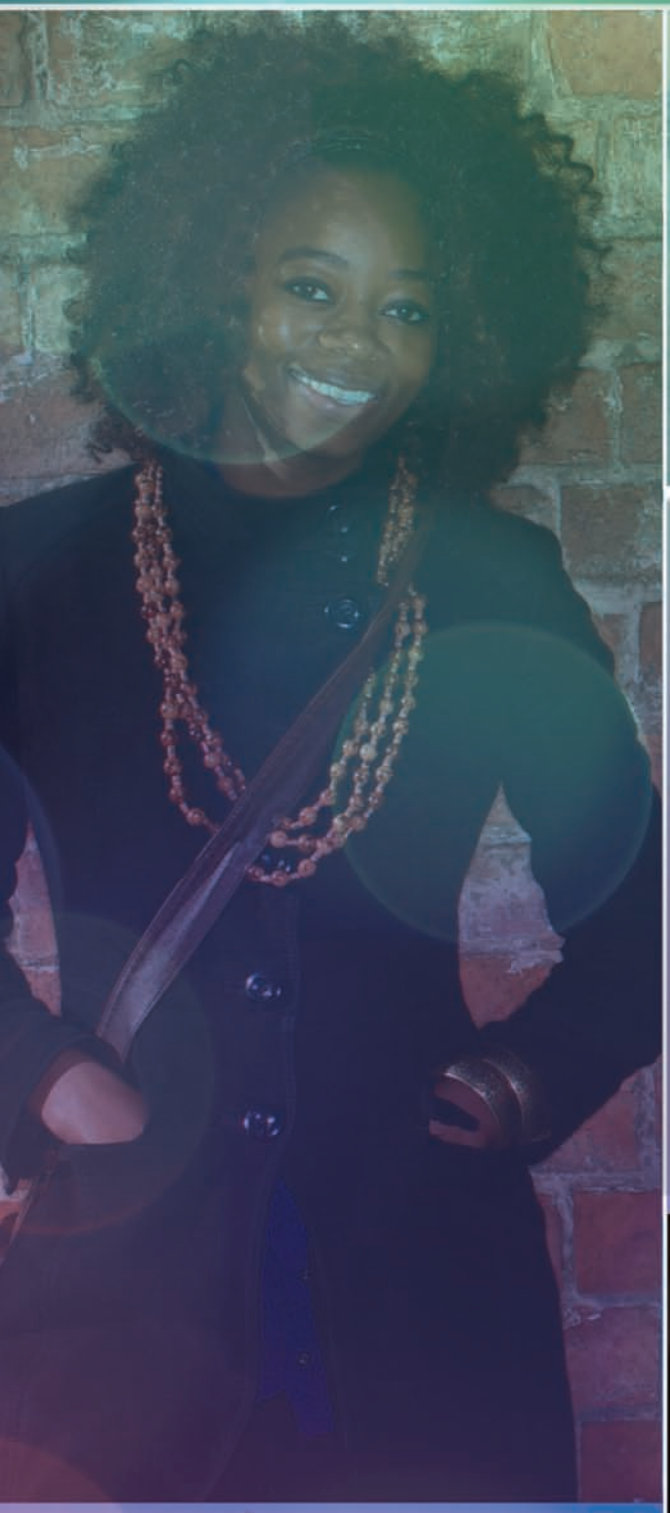

ADMISSIONS PROCESS REVIEW **CONSULTATION**

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Foreword

This report is presented for consultation on behalf of the UCAS Board and is the culmination of six months' work by the UCAS Admissions Process Review Team and Steering Group. It represents the first comprehensive review of an admissions process which has served the higher education sector and applicants well for 50 years since the inception of UCCA in 1961.

However, the changing profile and needs of applicants and new approaches to the funding of higher education have combined to create a very different environment both for the provision of higher education and for those wishing to apply to study. Our review of the admissions system and our proposals for reform are therefore timely.

The extensive evidence base generated from the review has led us to identify a number of key findings and conclusions. These indicate that despite its many benefits, there are aspects of the current system that could be improved. The principal conclusions are:

- many applicants are asked to make choices about what and where to study before they are fully ready.
- the combined effect of predicted grades, insurance choices and Clearing have led to a system that is complex, lacks transparency for many applicants and is inefficient and cumbersome for HEIs.
- only the best informed applicants and advisers are able to optimise UCAS applications and there is an undesirable divide between those applicants who receive effective advice and those who do not.

We are consulting on the proposal for a significant change to admissions processes whereby applicants would apply only with known grades. We contend that these proposals will deliver significant benefits, efficiencies and cost savings for all users and that they put the applicant at the heart of the system. We believe that the earliest feasible date for implementation of this proposal would be 2016. However, we propose a phased approach with a significant enhancement of the current process for 2014. These developments are designed to deliver significant benefits to applicants and efficiencies for HEIs. We believe they will also help prepare users for more significant changes later.

We present this report and consultation knowing that there are many questions still unanswered and that there are complexities across the different school, college and higher education systems in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland yet to be solved. However, we think it is right to consult now on our work so far, acknowledging that there would need to be agreement from the four UK administrations and that a technical design and consultation phase would need to follow any decisions arising from this exercise.

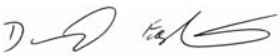
The UCAS Board is very clear that it is not for UCAS to make decisions on behalf of the customers of its services; but we do recognise the unique perspective of the organisation to understand admissions right across a diverse sector and we make our proposals from a detailed evidence base and with the benefit of advice from many expert users and observers of the system. In particular, we would like to record our thanks for the time and commitment of members of the Steering Group for this project who are listed in paragraph 3.7.

Our proposals are somewhat differentiated from previous concepts for a post-results admissions system – often referred to as 'Post Qualifications Applications' or PQA. This is the

first time that changes to the admissions system have been developed with the benefit of a fundamental process review and accompanied by a fully modelled proposal for a post-results system which is workable and which seeks to limit, as far as possible, changes for users. We hope this will allow respondents to focus less on the process issues and more on whether the ends justify the means.

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

This report represents probably the most comprehensive account of admissions issues ever compiled in the UK. It is both a mirror and a window for the HE sector and we hope that it will provide a basis for deep reflection and debate about how best the sector, across the UK, can provide a fair and transparent process through which to admit students to higher education.



Professor David Eastwood, Chair UCAS Board and Vice-Chancellor, University of Birmingham

Rama Thirunamachandran, UCAS Board member, Chair of the UCAS Admissions Process Review Steering Group and Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost of Keele University

Executive summary

1.1. The purpose of this document is to give information and to consult on a proposal to move the process for undergraduate admission to higher education in the UK to one where applications are made after examination results have been received. There is also a proposal for an interim enhancement of the current system. No policy decisions have yet been taken and the aim of this consultation is to present evidence to key stakeholders to enable them to shape future policy.

1.2. We wish to consult widely on these proposals and welcome feedback in respect of fairness, widening participation and efficiency. We also want to understand the extent to which the proposals address the key problems with the current system, especially early applications, the insurance choice, the Clearing process and the reliance on predicted grades.

1.3. It is in two sections:

- Section 1: A report of UCAS' Admissions Process Review
- Section 2: The actual consultation which includes:
  - proposals for reform
  - a timetable for reform
  - consultation questions.

1.4. It is directed at senior leaders in higher education, schools and colleges, representatives of applicants to higher education and other stakeholders such as awarding bodies, representative organisations, government departments and their agencies. This is a UK-wide consultation.

1.5. The consultation is open until 20 January 2012. In addition to the online consultation, UCAS will be holding a number of consultation events the details of which will be published on the UCAS website. A report of the consultation and proposed next steps will be published in March 2012.

The Admissions Process Review

1.6. As UCAS passes the milestone of its 50th application cycle since the inception of UCCA, this is the first fundamental review of the admissions process since 1961. The process facilitated by UCAS today has changed very little since that time, although online technology has long replaced the original paper-based service.

1.7. In September 2010, the UCAS Board ratified a new corporate strategy which included a fundamental review of admissions processes. The review was initiated because:

- there was evidence that incremental changes over the years had made the system complex and difficult to navigate.
- the UCAS technology platform was in need of renewal which provided the opportunity to review the processes it supported.
- in England significant changes were likely to follow the funding and policy changes introduced by the Coalition Government; changes were also likely in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- in recent years, there had been significant increases in the volume of applications, the diversity of qualifications supporting applications, changes in applicant profiles and needs, and an increasing diversity in providers and modes of delivery.
- advances in technology have significantly changed the expectations of users of the UCAS system in terms of service, responsiveness and flexibility.

- the information needs of learners and the higher education sector have changed.

1.8. The review set out to provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence with which to assess the current admissions process and understand the scope for improvement.

Scope and methodology

1.9. The review work included:

- conducting research with 23 higher education institutions (HEIs) which included in-depth site visits to map processes and understand work flows and effort for each part of the process.
- 21 HEI drop-in sessions for admissions staff to engage in the review, comment on the findings and emerging models and to share local issues.
- 11 site visits focussing on technology issues for HEIs; six IT supplier workshops; workshops with the University Forum for In-House Systems and with the Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (Corporate Information Systems Group); briefings at technical seminars for software houses and suppliers.
- interviews and focus groups with applicants, schools and FE colleges, advisers and parents.
- stakeholder workshops including Universities UK, Guild HE, the Association of Colleges, the Student Loans Company, OFFA, the Russell Group, UCAS Schools Advisory Groups, Arty Admissions and the Academic Registrars Council (ARC).
- research on international admissions systems covering Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Ontario, Ireland, Croatia, British Columbia and Australia (Victoria, New South Wales, and Central, South and Northern Territories).
- seven regional workshops to give admissions practitioners the opportunity to explore the findings from the site visits and comment on the developing models.
- surveys of current applicants, students, re-appliers, and UCAS members.
- statistical analysis using UCAS historical data.

Key findings and conclusions

1.10. The extensive evidence base from the review led to a number of key findings and conclusions. It highlighted many positive features that have evolved through years of experience. The system allows different timetables for applications to follow specialist courses such as medicine or veterinary medicine, as well as to Oxford and Cambridge. It is able to handle applications from those with non-traditional qualifications and has been agile in dealing with new qualifications such as the Diploma or the Welsh Baccalaureate. However, it also indicated that there are aspects that could be improved and many applicants are asked to make choices about courses and HEIs before they are ready. The cumulative effect of predicted grades, insurance choices and Clearing have led to a system that is complex, is thought to lack transparency for many applicants and is inefficient and cumbersome for HEIs. Only the best informed applicants and advisers are able to optimise UCAS applications and there is an undesirable divide between those applicants who receive effective advice and those who do not.

1.11. Key findings

- The admissions process means that many applicants need to make decisions about higher education at least six months before they receive their results.
- The UCAS admissions process is complex and many applicants find it hard to understand.

- Well-supported applicants and knowledgeable advisers can optimise the outcomes of UCAS applications.
- Operational practice and admissions strategies employed by HEIs are varied and not transparent to applicants. This is particularly true in respect of predicted grades.
- The system of insurance choices is not well used by some applicants and creates significant operational problems for HEIs.
- The Clearing system is inefficient, stressful and confusing for applicants.
- There are many aspects of the admissions process which could be optimised to provide efficiencies for HEIs and benefits for applicants.
- UCAS is a 'one-size-fits-all' system which does not optimise the process for non-traditional applicants such as international, part-time, and mature applicants; it is not easily configurable for different start dates and different intensities of study.

1.12. Conclusions

- Young applicants would make more informed and mature choices about higher education if they were able to make them later in the cycle.
- The process and deadlines associated with the system need simplifying and streamlining. UCAS terminology needs updating and clarifying.
- The quality and veracity of advice and support given to applicants is very varied and may materially affect a candidate's chances of making an optimum application.
- Admissions practices naturally vary between HEIs year-on-year and are not transparent to applicants and their advisers. The best advised applicants are able to optimise their applications through UCAS.
- The insurance choice system is not working as a backstop for applicants and creates significant workload and operational problems for HEIs. It needs to be replaced by something which better supports its purpose.
- Clearing is a sub-optimal admissions process that puts both applicants and HEIs under severe pressure.
- An upgrade of the UCAS technology platform and systems will provide the opportunity to improve efficiency, save cost, and improve the experience for both applicants and HEIs.
- UCAS needs to develop flexible services which meet the needs of all its customers and a wider range of applicants.

Proposals for reform

1.13. As a result of the evidence from this review UCAS now believes that there could be significant advantages in moving the process for admission to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK to one in which applications are made after receipt of qualification results. The purpose of this document is to present the evidence and consult on this recommendation and a proposed model for achieving it.

1.14. This would be a national initiative and despite the complexities of different examination systems and school and college term dates, we must ensure that any changes to the process meet the needs of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

1.15. We are putting forward a workable model to indicate how the new process could be implemented. There is still a lot of detail to be worked up and this is not a technical consultation. If the proposals are accepted it is expected that a technical consultation will follow.

1.16. The proposed post-results process differs significantly from the models put forward in the past. These were based on the current UCAS system and conceived in an earlier generation of technological possibilities and without the benefit of an end-to-end process review.

1.17. It is important to emphasise that the proposed system would not rely on results alone. The UK HE admissions system has always been characterised by its holistic approach and admissions decisions will continue to be based upon an assessment of latent talent and potential as well as prior achievement.

1.18. It is not possible to implement a post-results system without a significant change to the current timetable of admissions. However, we believe the changes are manageable and are shared by all the key stakeholders in the process. A level examinations would have to start 15 days earlier than at present, though less change would be needed to other examinations, for instance Scottish Highers or the International Baccalaureate (IB). Results would need to be available by early July and before the end of term for most schools, to allow time to fine tune applications based on known grades. We propose two parallel choices initially, with further applications in a later application window for those unsuccessful in the first round.

1.19. The model proposes an HEI start date of early October for first year students.

The model for reform

1.20. The application phase would be structured round three distinct application windows depending on the individual circumstances of the applicant. We recommend these are known as Apply 1, Apply 2 and Apply 3 to remove the stigma associated with parts of the current system such as Extra and Clearing. Each window would have defined open and close dates but common to each is the requirement that applications are submitted only once the applicant has met the entry requirements for the course for which they wish to apply.

1.21. Apply 1 would be open throughout the cycle for applicants who already have their results or appropriate entry qualifications at the start of the admissions cycle.

1.22. Apply 2 would be the main part of the cycle and would meet the needs of the majority of applicants who take examinations in the year of entry to higher education. It would open at the end of June with an equal consideration deadline of the third week in July.
We recommend two choices initially. HEIs would communicate decisions by the third week in September.

1.23. Apply 3 would open from the end of July and close in early October for those not holding offers from Apply 2 or those applying after Apply 2 has closed. Applicants would apply to one course at a time with a gathered field operating on day one of Apply 3.

1.24. We believe that a system that makes judgements based on actual grades achieved and not on predicted grades will remove unpredictability from the process and be fairer to all applicants. Widening participation may be facilitated if we have a fairer, more transparent and simpler system, with applicants clear at the outset whether they meet the minimum requirements for a course. The proposed model is intended to deliver productivity and cost

efficiencies for applicants, HEIs and UCAS, ensuring that the process is more streamlined, reducing unnecessary, low-value transactions for all parties. Although the emphasis has been on mainstream UK-based undergraduate applicants, we believe it will also deliver benefit for international, mature and part-time students.

Timetable for reform

1.25. We recognise that a move to a post-results system would represent significant change for applicants, schools and colleges as well as for HEIs and awarding bodies. We believe it is neither possible nor desirable for a post results system to be introduced before 2016 year of entry, which is for students starting their penultimate year in school in September 2014. Because applicants would need to know the process and timetable for HE admissions before starting their level 3 or equivalent curriculum, the process would need to be agreed and publicised two years before implementation. Schools, colleges, and awarding bodies, would need time to prepare for the changes in the examination timetable.

1.26. However, significant reforms to the current admissions process could be made before that date and we recommend that enhancements to the current system are introduced for 2014 year of entry. These do not require significant changes to the current examination and admissions timetable.

1.27. These improvements do not represent fundamental reform of the current admissions process. They do however introduce changes which will improve efficiency, enhance the applicant experience and prepare for the change to a post-results system in 2016 by improving the process for applications made later in the cycle.

1.28. The 2014 changes would introduce the concept of three managed application windows, Apply 1, Apply 2 and Apply 3. Apply 1 would be open to applicants from September for entry the following autumn. Apply 2 would be open from February to August for applicants not holding any offers or only one offer from Apply 1, applying to one choice at a time. Apply 3 would be open to those who have not been placed by Confirmation. It would operate as described for the 2016 model with a gathered field operating on day one.

1.29. Consultation

All consultation questions are embedded in the main body of the text in the section to which they refer. We hope you will find this helpful as you consider your responses. You may respond to the consultation online at **www.ucas.com/admissionsprocessreview** where you will find full instructions on how to respond. Responses should be received no later than 20 January 2012.

Section I

2. Purpose

2.1. The purpose of this document is to give information and to consult on a proposal to move the process for undergraduate admission to higher education in the UK to one where applications are made after examination results have been received. There is also a proposal for an interim enhancement of the current system.

2.2. It is in two sections:

- Section 1: A report of UCAS' Admissions Process Review.
- Section 2: The actual consultation which includes:
  - proposals for reform
  - a timetable for reform
  - consultation questions.

2.3. Further sections outline how to respond to the consultation and how to register for consultation events.

2.4. It is directed at senior leaders in higher education, schools and colleges, representatives of applicants to higher education and other stakeholders such as awarding bodies, representative organisations, government departments and their agencies. This is a UK-wide consultation.

2.5. The consultation is open until 20 January 2012. In addition to the online consultation, UCAS will be holding a number of consultation events, the details of which will be published on the UCAS website. A report of the consultation and proposed next steps will be published in March 2012.

3. Rationale for the review

3.1. The higher education sector is going through a period of significant change in terms of structure, funding and regulation. In England, the HE White Paper of June 2011 aims to increase competition between English HE providers and enhance choice for learners in order to drive up teaching quality (including preparing students for work), promote social mobility, and put higher education on a sustainable financial footing.

3.2. In Scotland the Curriculum for Excellence will transform pre-18 education and, right across the UK, changes in tuition fees and student finance could have wide ranging impacts on the volume and distribution of applications, as well as the courses offered by universities and colleges. In this environment, learners will want to consider carefully their choices of what, where and how to pursue higher education and will want an admissions system which is easy to use, transparent and fair. UCAS wants to ensure that

the sector has an admissions service that puts students at the heart of the system and provides the flexibility to support different pathways to higher education.

3.3. HEIs have autonomy over their own admissions. UCAS underpins admissions by providing a shared admissions service to over 300 universities and colleges.

3.4. As UCAS passes the milestone of its 50th application cycle since the inception of UCCA, this is the first fundamental review of the admissions process since 1961. The process facilitated by UCAS today has changed very little since that time, although online technology has long replaced the original paper-based service.

3.5. In September 2010, the UCAS Board ratified a new corporate strategy[1] which included a fundamental review of admissions processes. The review was initiated because:

- there was evidence that incremental changes over the years had made the system complex and difficult to navigate.
- the UCAS technology platform was in need of renewal and this provided the opportunity to review the processes it supports.
- in England significant changes were likely to follow the funding and policy changes introduced by the Coalition Government; changes were also likely in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- in recent years, there had been significant increases in the volume of applications, the diversity of qualifications supporting applications, changes in applicant profiles and needs, and an increasing diversity in providers and modes of delivery.
- advances in technology have significantly changed the expectations of users of the UCAS system in terms of service, responsiveness and flexibility.
- the information needs of learners and the higher education sector have changed.

3.6. In the early 1960s, the principal rationale for a centralised admissions service was to prevent applicants from holding multiple offers for admission. While this remains a core benefit, our HEI members also use the service to manage admissions where numbers are controlled for funding purposes.

3.7. The UCAS Board asked Rama Thirunamachandran, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost of Keele University, to chair the Steering Group for the review and work started in March 2011. Members of the Steering Group to whom UCAS owes grateful thanks for their engagement and advice during this review include:

- Bella Malins, Head of Outreach and Admissions at UCL and Chair of UCAS Change User Group.
- Chris Sexton, Director of Corporate Information & Computing Services at the University of Sheffield.
- Colin Riordan, Vice Chancellor at the University of Essex.
- Dame Jackie Fisher, Chief Executive at Newcastle College.
- Debbie McVitty of NUS.
- Eileen Martin, Pro Vice Chancellor at Teesside University.
- Geoff Parks, Director of Undergraduate Admissions at the University of Cambridge.
- Julie Lydon, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Glamorgan.

[1] http://www.ucas.com/about_us/whoweare/governance/management/corporatestrategy

- John Morgan, Past President of ASCL and Head of Conyers School, Yarm.
- Matthew Andrews, Chair of the Admissions Practitioner Group, part of the Academic Registrars Council.
- Rama Thirunamachandran, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost of Keele University.
- Shona Cormack, Vice-Principal and Pro Vice-Master at Robert Gordon University.
- Stephen Marshall, Registrar at the University of the Arts.
- Tricia King, Pro Vice-Master at Birkbeck University of London.

3.8. UCAS has also consulted informally with a wide range of stakeholders across the UK and we are very grateful to them for their input[2].

4. Principles

4.1. The UCAS Board and the Steering Group agreed a number of underlying principles both to inform the review and to establish what an effective admissions process must continue to deliver. These indicate the need for the admissions process to:

- be fair and support access for all applicants.
- put the needs of applicants at the heart of the system.
- be able to cope with a wide diversity of applicants.
- be an efficient and effective process delivering member efficiencies and minimising unnecessary transactions and cost.
- consider synergies with student finance and other external agencies.
- deliver a net benefit to applicants, members, stakeholders and UCAS.

5. Scope and methodology

5.1. The scope of the review initially focussed on full-time undergraduate admissions to higher education. Although some work has been done to consider whether UCAS could better support admissions to part-time undergraduate study and postgraduate taught courses, more work is needed on these areas and will be the subject of further review in 2012.

5.2. The review set out to provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence with which to assess the current admissions process and understand the scope for improvement. The review work included:

- conducting research with 23 HEIs from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales which included in-depth site visits to map processes and understand work flows and effort for each part of the process.
- 21 HEI drop in sessions for admissions staff to engage in the review, comment on the

[2] A list of these organisations can be found at http://www.ucas.com/reviews/admissionsprocessreview.

findings and emerging models and to share local issues.

- 11 site visits focussing on technology issues for HEIs; six IT supplier workshops; workshops with the University Forum for In-House Systems and with the Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (Corporate Information Systems Group); briefings at technical seminars for software houses and suppliers.
- interviews and focus groups with applicants, schools and FE colleges, advisers and parents.
- stakeholder workshops including Universities UK, Guild HE, the Association of Colleges, the Student Loans Company, OFFA, the Russell Group, UCAS Schools Advisory Groups, Arty Admissions and Academic Registrars Council (ARC).
- research on international admissions systems covering Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Ontario, Ireland, Croatia, British Columbia, and Australia (Victoria, New South Wales, Central, and South and Northern Territories).
- seven regional workshops to give admissions practitioners the opportunity to explore the findings from the site visits and comment on the developing models.
- surveys of current applicants, students, re-appliers, and UCAS members.
- statistical analysis using UCAS historical data.

5.3. Once the evidence collection had been completed, the UCAS Admissions Process Review Team started developing admissions models which were shared and iterated with a number of stakeholders as outlined above.

6. Overview of the current admissions system

6.1. The current UCAS application service, Apply, opens in September. Applicants to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and for courses in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science are required to apply by 15 October for entry in the following autumn. All other applicants, with the exception of some art and design courses, are required to apply by the 15 January to be guaranteed 'equal consideration'. In practice, applications are accepted by many HEIs throughout the cycle. However from late January, HEIs can close courses with a 15 January application deadline to prevent new applications.

6.2. Applicants may make applications for up to five courses. Each receiving HEI has no information about other choices made and there is no ranking of choices.

6.3. By the end of March, HEIs should have made decisions on all applications received by 15 January deadline. Applicants are then able to accept a firm choice and an insurance choice; all other offers must be declined. Any applicants who have not received or accepted an offer from any of their initial five choices may make additional applications (one choice at a time) through Extra.

6.4. Where applicants are applying with predicted grades, HEIs make offers which are 'conditional' on the final achievement of specified qualification outcomes.

6.5. Conditional offers are confirmed or otherwise following receipt of exam results. The majority are published on the third Thursday in August (A level results day) or before in the case of others such as Scottish Highers and the International Baccalaureate (IB). BTEC results are provided to students on a rolling basis throughout the academic year. A small number of results (including GCSE – typically mathematics and English) are confirmed after this date.

6.6. Applicants may enter Clearing after receiving their results if they have not met the conditions of their offer, or enter Adjustment if they have exceeded the conditions of their offer and wish to change their university choice.

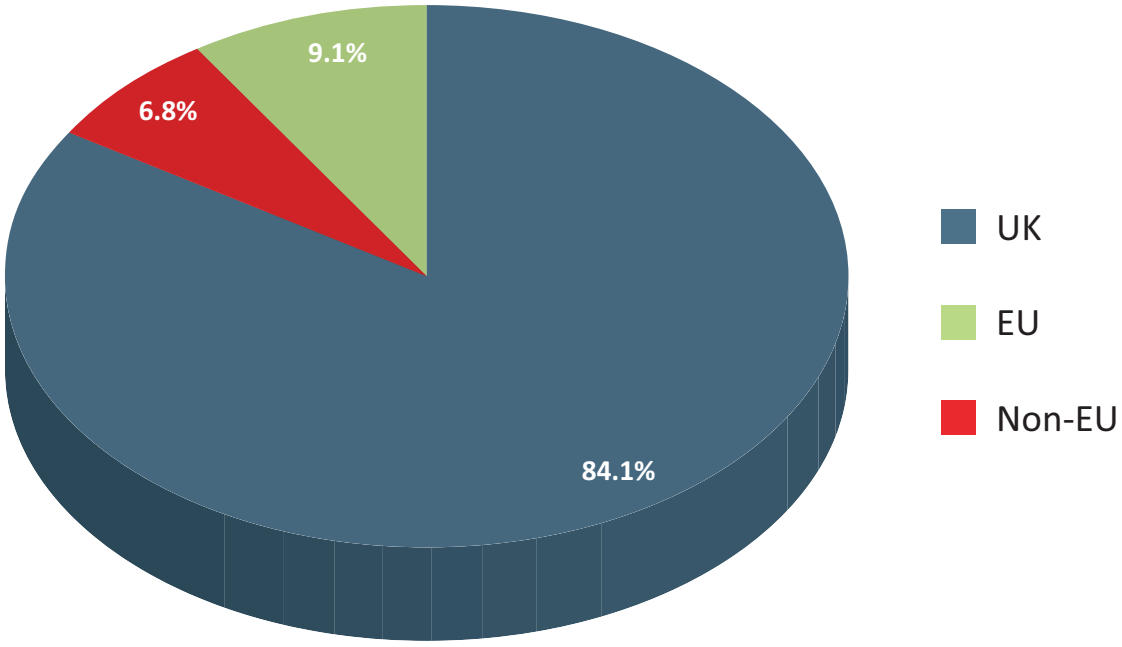
6.7. Those who apply with confirmed examination results and grades, have a relatively straight forward experience. If they apply through the main scheme[3] they will receive unconditional offers, which they may accept or decline, or they may apply directly to an HEI and their place will be recorded in the UCAS system. Therefore most of the issues with the current system relate to those applicants who receive conditional offers which are confirmed later in the cycle. For 2010 year of entry 87% of offers were conditional and 13% were unconditional[4].

7. Applicants served by the current admissions system

7.1. The review is set in the context of a UK-wide admissions system that currently handles 697,000[5] applicants who increasingly require more flexibility within the system to meet their differing needs.

7.2. The current admissions system is structured to meet the needs of applicants following the UK academic calendar. However, last year 16% of all applicants were domiciled outside of the UK.

Graph 1: Domicile of applicants applying through UCAS



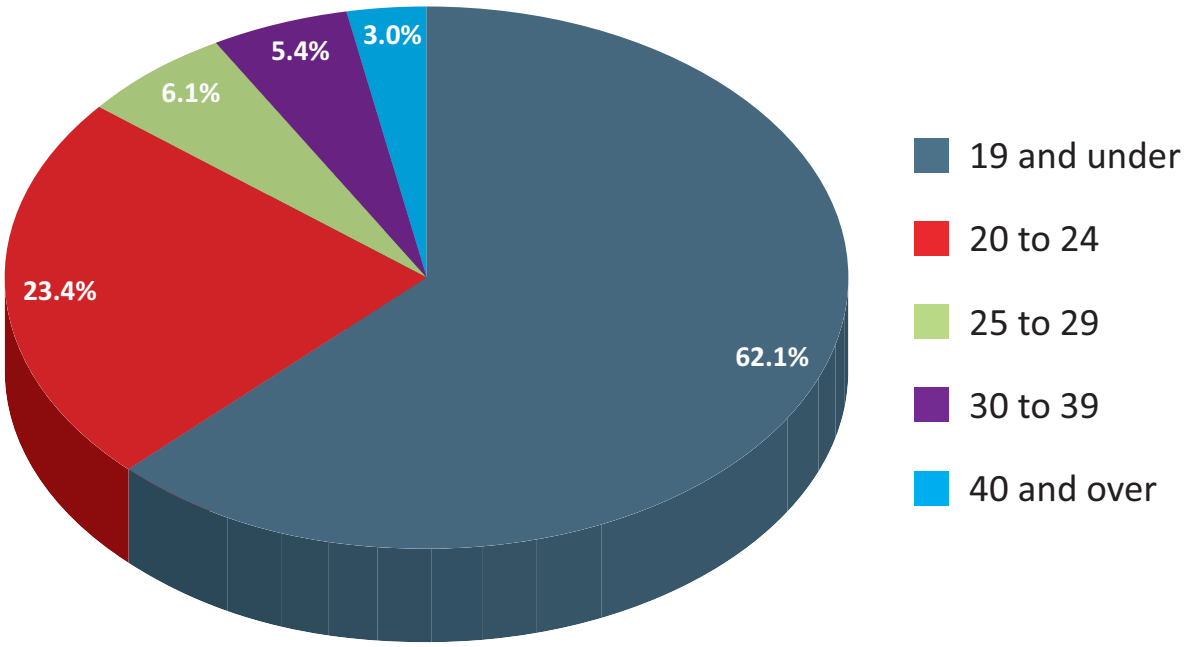
[3] Main scheme: the principal method of application, excluding other methods such as Clearing.
[4] Refer to Reference 3: Admissions processing volumes for 2010 year of entry.
[5] UCAS data for 2010 year of entry. All figures in this document have been rounded.

7.3. Applicants based outside the UK often need to apply later in the admissions cycle due to different academic calendars. Only 15% of UK applicants apply after the 15 January equal consideration deadline compared with 23% of EU and 45% of Non-EU applicants. This potentially places international students at a disadvantage within the system[6].

7.4. The perception of applicants applying through UCAS as 18-19 year old school leavers is increasingly out of date with 38% of all applicants aged over 20.

7.5. Like international students, older applicants prefer to apply later in the admissions cycle with 36% of those aged over 20 applying after the 15 January deadline compared to just 8% of those aged 19 and under[7].

Graph 2: Age profile of applicants applying through UCAS

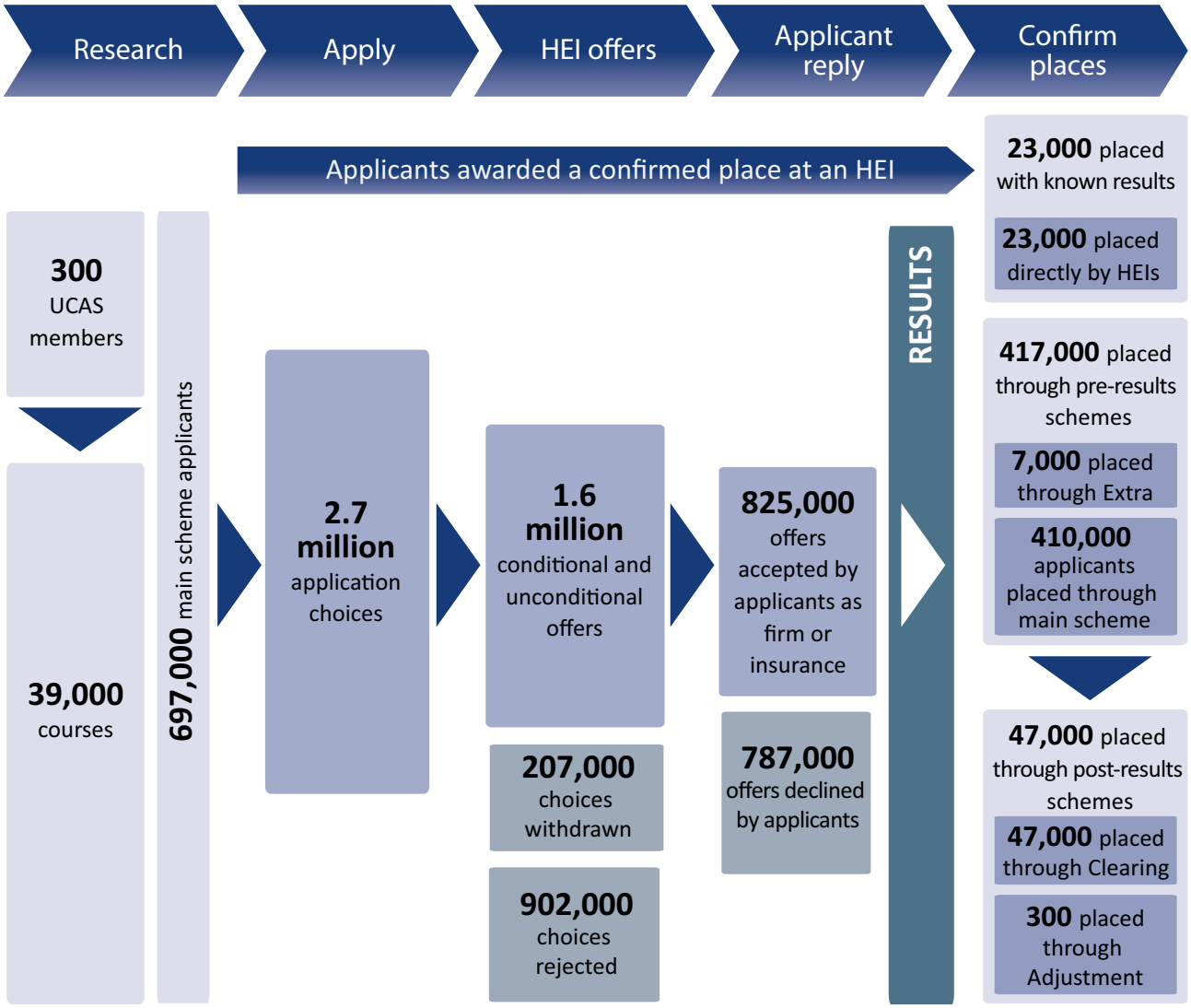


6 7.2 and 7.3 refer to Reference 1: Domicile of applicants applying through UCAS for 2010 year of entry.
7 7.4 and 7.5 refer to Reference 2: Age profile of applicants applying through UCAS for 2010 year of entry.

8. Processing within the current admissions system

8.1. The diagram below illustrates the volume of processing that is required at different stages of the admissions process and the number of applicants placed at the end of the cycle through the different admissions schemes.

Diagram 1: The current admissions process with volumes[8]



[8] 8.1 and 8.2 refer to Reference 3: Admissions processing volumes for 2010 year of entry.

8.2. The following statistics apply to the 2010 year of entry admissions cycle:

- 2.7million choices were submitted by 697,000 applicants; an average of 3.9 choices per applicant.
- UCAS received results for 383,000 (55%) applicants through the Awarding Body Linkage (ABL) process. Analysis of the 337,000 (88%) who applied with A levels and Scottish Highers revealed that 64,600 (19%) were applying with their results.
- 207, 000 (8%) application choices were later withdrawn or cancelled by the applicant, 902,000 (33%) choices were rejected by HEIs and 1.6 million (59%) choices resulted in conditional or unconditional offers.
- 787,000 (49%) conditional and unconditional offers were declined by the applicant, 508,000 (31%) offers were accepted as a 'firm'[9] choice and 317,000 (20%) were accepted as an 'insurance'[10] choice.
- Of the 508,000 accepted firm choices 372,000 (73%) resulted in an applicant being placed. Of the 317,000 accepted insurance choices only 38,000 (12%) resulted in an applicant being placed.
- 380,000 (55%) applicants either chose not to or were not eligible to use their insurance choice, including those who received no offers or withdrew from the system.
- There were 52,600 applicants to Clearing; 9,000 (17%) applied directly to Clearing and 43,600 (83%) had applied through the main scheme first.
- Of the latter group, 31,400 (72%) had a firm choice at Confirmation (but did not meet the conditions of the offer), 4,300 (10%) had received offers but not made a firm choice and 7,900 (18%) had received no offers. Of those applicants receiving no offers, 3,200 (40%) had applied to fewer than five choices so were not eligible for Extra.
- At the end of the cycle, 487,300 (70% of total) applicants were accepted for full-time undergraduate courses; this included:
  - 72% of UK applicants
  - 54% of EU applicants
  - 59% of non-EU applicants
- Under the current system, applicants can be placed through a number of different schemes. Of the 487,300 applicants placed for 2010 year of entry:
  - 23,000 (5%) were accepted directly by an HEI
  - 410,000 (84%) were accepted through the main scheme, made up of 372,000 (76%) accepting their firm choice and 38,000 (8%) accepting their insurance choice
  - 7,000 (1%) were accepted through Extra
  - 47,000 (10%) were accepted through Clearing
  - 300 (<1%) were accepted through Adjustment
- At the end of the cycle 210,000 (30%) applicants remained unplaced; 20,000 (10%) had withdrawn from the system, 183,000 (87%) had applied through the main scheme and 6,000 (3%) had applied directly through Clearing. Of the 183,000 that were unplaced through the main scheme 63,000 (34%) had declined offers.

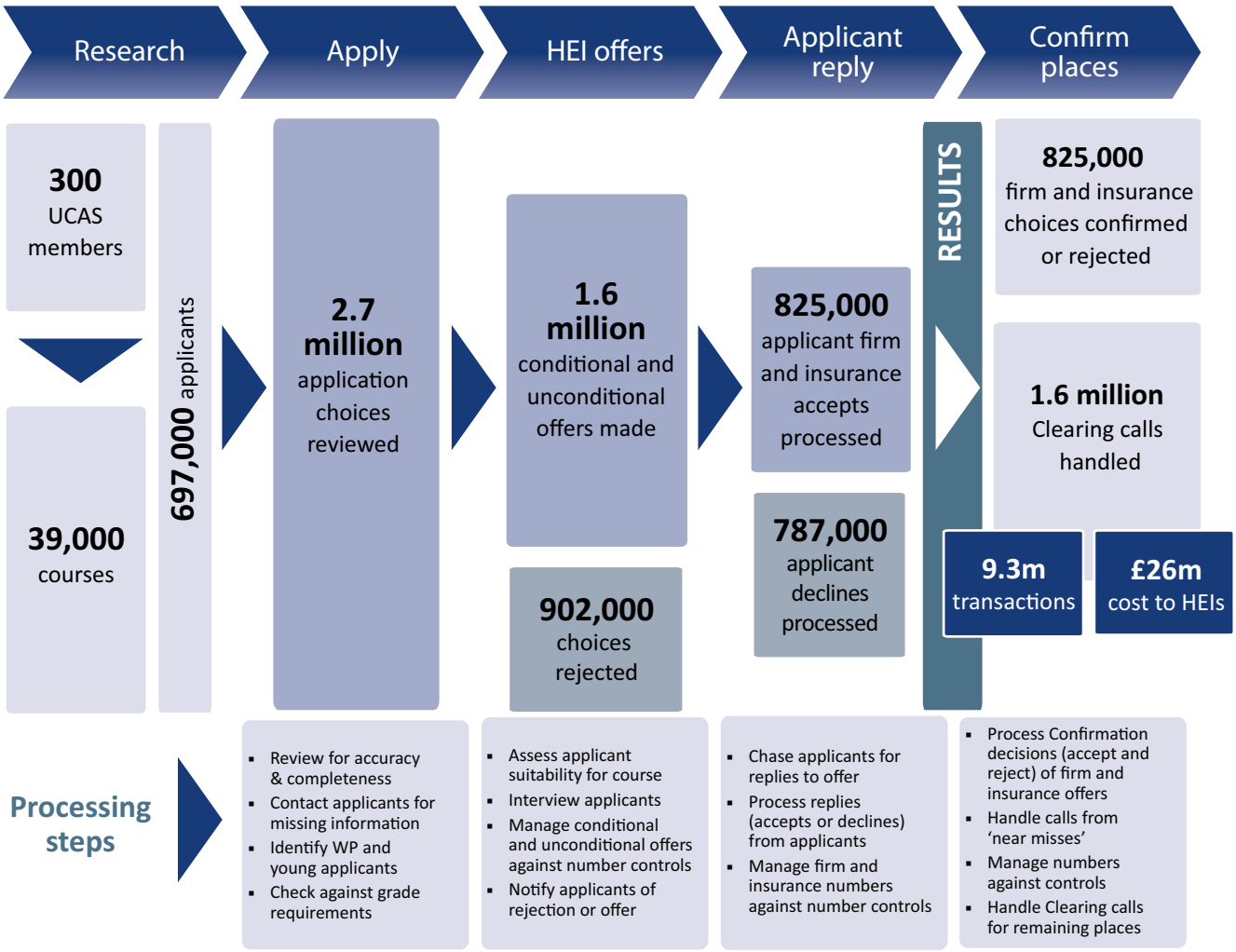
[9] Firm choice: the preferred choice out of the offers received.
[10] Insurance choice: may act as a back-up to the firm choice if the conditions of the firm choice are not met.

9. HEI transactions within the current admissions system

9.1. The diagram below illustrates the volume of transactions[11] that require HEI processing across the sector as a whole to place applicants in the current admissions system. A value has been placed on the indicative cost to the sector based on estimated times to perform each transaction[12].

9.2. Currently HEIs process 2.7 million applicant choices, of which over 207,000 (8%) are withdrawn or cancelled by the applicant within the admissions cycle. A total of 1.6 million (59%) conditional and unconditional offers are made, almost four times the number of placed applicants. A further 902,000 (33%) applications are rejected. HEIs must then process 1.6 million responses to these offers, of which 784,000 (49%) are declined by the applicant and 825,000 (51%) are accepted as firm and insurance choices. Finally, when results are received 825,000 firm and insurance choices are processed and an estimated 1.6 million Clearing calls are taken to place 410,000 applicants. Therefore, in the current model we estimate that HEIs process 9.3 million transactions to place just 410,000 applicants.

Diagram 2: HEI transactions to process admissions



[11] Transaction: HEI decision about an application or processing of an applicant response.
[12] 9.1 and 9.2 refer to Reference 4: HEI transactions and indicative cost to process admissions.

Key findings and conclusions from the review

This section of the report presents the key findings from the review and draws conclusions that informed the development of later proposals.

10. Key finding 1: The admissions process means that many applicants need to make choices about higher education at least six months before they receive their results.

10.1. A combination of year-on-year increases in the volume of applications, increases in achievement, and perceived and real competition for places in HE has resulted in a gradual increase in the number of applications made early in the cycle, particularly by UK applicants.

10.2. Within the UCAS system, we observe the following[14]:

- 207,000 applications (choices) were withdrawn or cancelled before an HEI decision had been made.
- 35,000 calls were received by UCAS about changing choices and swapping decisions.
- 9,000 applicants who were eligible to accept their insurance choices declined them.
- 83,000 of the 210,000 applicants who were 'unplaced'[15] at the end of the cycle had declined offers or withdrawn voluntarily from the system.
- Of the 83,000 2010 applicants who re-applied in 2011, 58,000 had received offers in 2010.

Table 1: Total application volumes throughout the admissions cycle[13]

Year of entry	% applying before 15 October	% applying between 15 October and 15 January	% applying after 15 January
2009	10%	62%	28%
2010	10%	72%	18%
2011	11%	73%	16%

[13] Table 1 refer to Reference 5: Application volumes throughout the admissions cycle.
[14] 10.2 and 10.3 refer to Reference 6: Observations within the current admissions system.
[15] Unplaced: an applicant who does not have a confirmed place.

10.3. Applicant surveys revealed that about half of applicants made choices that they weren't particularly interested in and that 34% had not undertaken any visits to HEIs prior to submitting their application.

10.4. Quotes

"I think we should be able to choose more than five options, so that there is more time after applying to undertake more research into the universities."

"University open days need to be much earlier in the academic year. Most of the days were after the application was sent in, so my decision was based on course criteria rather than the location."

"It is hard to know sometimes which unis to choose and many people don't go to the open days until after they have applied and then don't like the unis they have chosen to apply for."

"I think students should have more chance to change their options afterwards."

"I achieved the required grades but decided against all my choices and found one I now love through Clearing."

10.5. HEIs offering art and design courses indicated that the Apply process takes place before the applicant is well-placed to know which area they wish to specialise in, even though they are required to state this as part of their application. This issue is not exclusive to art and design courses but experienced by a variety of other courses such as history, science and music.

10.6. School advisers suggested that applicants make better decisions about what to study as they progress through the school year. There is a view that this applies particularly to disadvantaged pupils whose performance may improve sharply towards the end of their course.

10.7. Conclusion 1

Young applicants would make more informed and mature choices about higher education if they were able to make them later in the cycle.

11. Key finding 2: The UCAS admissions process is complex and many applicants find it hard to understand.

11.1. Years of small incremental changes to the system have accumulated to create a system which is no longer clear, intuitive and logical. Applicant feedback through surveys, focus groups and calls to the UCAS call centre showed[16]:

- UCAS jargon was not well understood by applicants. While familiar to experienced admissions practitioners, decades-old terminology such as 'CF', 'UF', 'CI' etc[17] was not well understood by applicants. Terms such as 'referred in Clearing' or 'declined by default' were even more unclear.
- in 2010, UCAS received approximately 9,000 calls asking for explanations of confusing terminology.
- 29% of applicants surveyed said information from UCAS was 'not easy' to understand.
- 42,000 calls were handled in the UCAS contact centre to answer the question: 'How do I apply?'
- the UCAS website section about deadlines in the system ran to several pages and contained 19 separate important dates and deadlines relating to the admissions process.
- lack of clarity generated calls to HEIs in addition to those received by UCAS. For example, HEIs reported receiving queries from applicants unsure whether they had missed application deadlines; not understanding the conditions of their offer; querying arrangements for interviews because the information on 'Track'[18] was not clear; and phoning to double-check that they

[16] 11.1 refer to Reference 7: Applicant survey results and call centre enquiries.

[17] CF, UF and CI: abbreviations meaning 'conditional firm', 'unconditional firm' and 'conditional insurance', terms used to describe the decision made by the applicant in relation to either a conditional or unconditional offer.

[18] Track: A system for applicants to track the progress of their application online and reply to offers they receive.

had been successful in achieving their place, despite having had this confirmed on Track.

- Entry Profiles[19] on Course Search did not always enable HEIs to present information as flexibly and as meaningfully as they wished.
- mature students who may not be supported by a knowledgeable school or college adviser found it hard to engage with the system.
- international students had particular difficulties in engaging with an admissions system which was different to that in their home country and did not always perceive a benefit in applying through UCAS rather than contacting the HEI directly.

11.2. Quotes

"It feels like joining a club where you don't know the rules."

"If I didn't have my teachers to help me I would not know what to do."

"The UCAS website including data entry could be easier to use and input data. Also your Track service should not need instructions on how to be used, but should be simple and intuitive."

11.3. Conclusion 2

The process and deadlines associated with the system need simplifying and streamlining. UCAS terminology needs updating and clarifying.

12. Key finding 3: Well supported applicants and knowledgeable advisers can optimise the outcomes of UCAS applications.

12.1. Applicants who receive good advice have a better chance of having an optimal confirmed offer after results day. The insurance choice, designed to provide a backstop for applicants who fail to meet the conditions of their first choice, is poorly understood, leaving many well qualified applicants without an offer and needing to apply through Clearing or to reapply the following year.

- Some applicants, particularly younger learners at independent schools, are often advised to apply early in order to maximise their chances of getting an offer. The 15 October and 15 January application deadlines are meant to ensure that all applications submitted by these dates are given 'equal consideration'. However, there are indications that for some courses acceptance rates are higher for earlier applicants.
- Many highly qualified applicants apply only to a narrow range of very selective HEIs which find it difficult to differentiate between these applications. This leads each year to a number of candidates with excellent grades failing to gain a place.
- 42% of applicants hold an insurance choice with conditions which are harder or equal to the conditions for their first choice. This means that if they miss their grades, they may have no offer to fall back on and need to engage with Clearing or reapply.
- Well informed advisers understand how to maximise 'special considerations' and will engage direct with admissions offices to put the case on behalf of their applicants.
- An estimated 20-40% of applications have predicted grades which fail to meet the minimum entry requirements of the course applied for. In some courses up to 50% of applicants have predicted grades which do not meet the minimum entry requirements.
- Well supported applicants understand the sifting processes used by different HEIs and courses to differentiate between applicants with similar qualifications. The quality and understanding of information that is useful in applicant references is varied giving applicants with experienced referees an advantage.
- Upwards of 30% of applications (and higher for international) have missing or incomplete information[20].

[19] Entry Profiles: Comprehensive information available via UCAS to applicants about individual courses and institutions, including statistics and entry requirements.

[20] 12.1 refer to Reference 8: Information, advice and guidance for applicants.

- In 2010, 300 applicants were placed through the 'Adjustment[21]' process; the low take-up is due in part to a lack of understanding about the process, combined with limited numbers of places being made available.

Predicted Grades

12.2. This issue is particularly pertinent in respect of predicted grades.

12.3. The current admissions system administered by UCAS relies heavily on the estimated 84% of UK applicants submitting applications with predictions of their final examination grades. HEIs then make offers conditional on the achievement of specified grades in specified subjects, or, sometimes, on UCAS Tariff scores[22] which relate directly to the grades predicted[23].

12.4. In practice, there can be significant differences between grades for minimum entry requirements, an applicant's predicted grades, the grades specified in the conditional offer and the actual grades upon which an offer is confirmed or otherwise.

12.5. Our research and experience tells us that HEIs rely on a variety of statistical and empirical evidence when deciding on their admissions policies relating to predicted grades. Many will use (confirmed) GCSE and AS grades as predictors of final A2 outcomes. Others will have built up knowledge of the likely accuracy of predicted grades from schools and colleges that regularly send them applicants; some will combine information from personal statements and references to add to their estimations of accuracy. Such judgements are likely to be employed more assiduously in admissions offices for highly competitive courses where most or all applicants will be applying with predictions of the required grades. When making offers, HEIs will be factoring in the extent to which desirable applicants are receiving offers from competitors as well as discounting for under-achievement of predicted grades.

12.6. From research conducted by UCAS for BIS[24] we have the following information about the accuracy of predictions (although note that this information applies only to A level results, for which UCAS has both the volumes for statistical accuracy and the data via the Awarding Body Linkage software):

Table 2: Accuracy of predicted grades for 2009 year of entry

Outcome of predicted grade	Percentage	Scale of error
Over-predicted	41.7%	9.7% over-predicted by two or more grades
		32% over-predicted by one grade
Accurate	51.7%	n/a
Under-predicted	6.6%	6.2% under-predicted by one grade
		0.4% under-predicted by two or more grades

[21] Adjustment: a process whereby applicants who have achieved better results than expected and exceeded the conditions of their firm choice can apply for an alternative course with higher entry requirements.
[22] UCAS Tariff: the system for allocating points to qualifications used for entry to higher education.
[23] 12.3, Table 2 and 12.8 refer to Reference 9: Predicted grades.
[24] Investigating the Accuracy of Predicted A Level Grades as part of 2009 UCAS Admission Process, BIS, June 2011.

12.7. This research also found that the accuracy of predicted grades is higher for higher grades.

12.8. However, because this research is at an individual grade level it does not provide an accurate picture of the accuracy of a group of results, most typically three A levels, where we find that fewer than 10% of applicants have three accurate predictions. Although at individual grade level only 6.7% of A level grades are under-predicted, across a profile of three A level results, 28% receive at least one under-prediction. This could represent a significant proportion of applicants who are discouraged from applying to more demanding courses for which they might eventually be qualified. A further 79% of applicants receive at least one over-prediction across three grades.

12.9. Inflation of predicted grades is well understood and discounted for offer making purposes by HEIs. However, this is not well understood by applicants and is well understood only by the best informed schools and colleges, who are experienced in supporting applications to higher education.

12.10. Quotes

"Each year we're trying to get our applications in a bit earlier just to try and help them have a better chance of hearing sooner and less waiting about."

"We encourage our applicants to submit their applications in December in order to get them done before Christmas and out of the way to concentrate on exams."

"If other schools and colleges are not predicting accurately does that put our students at a disadvantage?"

"Schools spend a long time creating references but there's no mechanism for universities to give schools feedback about whether we are providing them with the right information."

"I want more information on how universities decide on making their offers – it would help me make more realistic choices."

"I don't want to miss out on a course because I was under-predicted on my grades."

"You should not be declined on your predicted grades because I got higher grades and couldn't change the predicted ones."

12.11. Conclusion 3

The quality and veracity of advice and support given to applicants is very varied and may materially affect a candidate's chances of making an optimal application.

13. Key finding 4: Operational practice and admissions strategies employed by HEIs are varied and are not always transparent to applicants.

13.1. Universities and colleges are responsible for setting and implementing their own admissions policies. This is a key aspect of academic and institutional autonomy. Although HEIs are looking to attract the best possible students, some courses will receive considerably more suitable applications than there are places thus requiring a degree of selection; other courses are primarily looking to recruit applicants to fill places. This means that the majority of admissions offices employ a range of strategies in order to attract the students they want, and to manage admissions against a target number of student places. Operational practices in admissions offices can affect applicant behaviour.

- Admissions offices employ different policies about applicants who narrowly miss their conditions meaning that applicants don't know whether conditions are 'hard' or 'soft'. This may change year to year and course to course depending on the ratio of applicants to places, and the HEI's exposure to insurance choices (which they are contractually obliged to honour) where the take-up rate may be volatile.

- UCAS accepts some flexibility in adhering to published deadlines, which can cause delays and bottlenecks in the system.
- After results, HEIs may juggle their 'near miss' applicants and Clearing applicants in order to secure the best applicants, and manage their numbers.
- Slow confirmation of offers after results means that downstream HEIs cannot release places into Clearing until they can judge their exposure to insurance choices.
- In August 2011, 65,000 applicants were awaiting decisions on their conditional offers two days after A level results day, and, nearly three weeks later, 24,000 of those were still unresolved[25].
- The Confirmation and Clearing process is often driven by HEIs managing their numbers against targets, and may not always be in the best interests of applicants.

13.2. Quotes

"Universities should have stricter deadlines to reply to applicants sooner so we know where we stand regarding offers."

"It would help to have a break between results day and Clearing opening to stop applicants from making rushed decisions and give HEIs time to gain more clarity on our final numbers."

"My firm choice uni took a full week to tell me I was unsuccessful. By this time there was nothing left this year in Clearing even though I had the grades."

"If all universities worked to the same deadlines it would make the process more efficient for everyone."

"I achieved five A levels, three 3 A stars and two A grades, five A grades at AS level and 12 GCSEs (eight A stars and four A grades). Not one university offered me a place."

13.3. Conclusion 4

Admissions practices naturally vary between HEIs year-on-year and are not always transparent to applicants and their advisers. Even the best-advised applicants may make false assumptions about admissions and offer-making practices.

14. Key finding 5: The system of insurance choices is not well used by some applicants and creates significant operational problems for HEIs.

14.1. Applicants are allowed to hold a second offer which 'insures' them against failing to meet the conditions of their first choice. This works properly only if the conditions of the insurance choice are less onerous than their firm choice. UCAS data indicate that 42% of applicants applying with predicted grades hold insurance choices with conditions harder than or equal to their firm choice.

14.2. This is in part due to receiving poor advice about the five choices they can make, and partly because many HEIs take a flexible approach to the conditions attached to their offers. Depending on the results achieved by their applicants holding conditional offers, HEIs will often manage their admissions numbers by confirming offers to candidates who have not quite met their conditions. Applicants and advisers cannot tell whether conditions will be 'hard' or 'soft' from one year to the next.

14.3. In Scotland many applicants are made unconditional offers on the basis of results in Scottish Highers achieved in S5, their fifth and penultimate year at secondary school or college, and therefore do not need an insurance choice.

14.4. While the insurance choice provides positive flexibility for the applicant, it creates unwanted flexibility for HEIs which are trying to manage their recruitment to an exact control number.

[25] 13.1 refer to Reference 10: Confirmation of conditional offers.

14.5. Some applicants do not understand that they should include courses with lower minimum requirements in their five choices if they are to secure an offer with lower conditions than their first choice. For the 2010 year of entry admissions cycle[26]:

- 73,000 applicants who were eligible to make an insurance choice[27] did not do so. 24,000 (33%) made a single unconditional firm choice, 22,000 (30%) made a single conditional firm choice and 27,000 (37%) declined or withdrew from all offers.
- Of the 22,000 applicants who were eligible to make an insurance choice but made only a single conditional choice, 4,000 were unplaced at the end of the cycle.
- 317,000 (45%) applicants made insurance choices although only 38,000 (12%) led to accepted places.
- 40,000 applicants were initially confirmed at their insurance choice but 2,000 (6%) later withdrew.
- 38,000 applicants were placed at their insurance choice (8% of accepted applicants) compared to 47,000 who were placed through Clearing (10% of accepted applicants).
- HEIs report that managing the complexities and uncertainties of the insurance choice extends the amount of time needed to process decisions at Confirmation and beyond.
- After results days, many applicants get stuck in the system as HEIs cannot release places into Clearing until they know how many of their insurance choices will be taken up. Applicants cannot be referred into Clearing until they have been rejected by both their firm and insurance choices. In 2011, 24,000 applicants had not received the outcome of the applications three weeks after A levels results day, of which 13,000 were UK domiciled.
- Even if an applicant has met the conditions of their firm choice, HEIs still process the insurance choice decision, creating additional and unnecessary work.
- Applicants want the flexibility offered by insurance choices including using it as a second option rather than a backstop.

14.6. Quotes

"I would prefer not to decline any offers, I would like to have more than one insurance choice."

"I preferred the university with the lower entry requirement so chose that as my firm choice. I did not have any other offers lower than my firm choice, so had to choose one with a grade higher."

"I still am not sure which course I would like to do. I saw having the insurance choice basically as having a second choice in case I change my mind about my firm choice."

"Was on waiting list for insurance choice and didn't want to lose the chance of getting a place through Clearing as they were not deciding either way to accept me or not!"

"I did better than expected and was told to go into Clearing to get something better than my firm choice."

14.7. Conclusion 5

The insurance choice system is not working as a backstop for applicants and creates significant workload and operational problems for HEIs. It needs to be replaced by something more fit-for-purpose.

15. Key finding 6: The Clearing system is inefficient for HEIs and stressful for applicants.

15.1. The Clearing system was devised as a process to match unplaced applicants with unfilled places after the confirmation of results. With recent increases in applications for higher education, combined with a cap on the number of places available, Clearing has become a high pressure, frenzied process for both applicants and HEIs.

[26] 14.5 refer to Reference 11: Use of the insurance choice.
[27] Applicants are eligible to make an insurance choice if they receive two or more offers and their firm choice is conditional.

Table 3: Volume and percentage of applicants placed through Clearing[28]

Year	Number of applicants placed through Clearing	% of total acceptances
1995	40,929	14.1%
2000	45,421	13.4%
2005	37,197	9.2%
2010	46,925	9.6%

15.2. Although around 80% of UCAS member HEIs advertised vacancies in Clearing in 2011, selecting HEIs typically have very few places available and they are quickly filled.

15.3. Once A level and other results have been announced, about 73% of applicants with a firm choice are placed at their first choice HEI. Other applicants can either accept their insurance choice (if they have met the conditions) or seek a place through Clearing. In 2010, 9,000 applicants applied directly through Clearing. Once an applicant engages with Clearing, they can search for vacancies on the UCAS Clearing Vacancy Search. They then telephone the HEIs concerned to discuss their application. They will get a verbal indication whether their application is likely to be successful. If encouraged to apply, they submit their application using the UCAS website. In 2010, 52,600 applicants submitted 68,000 applications in Clearing, with 47,000 (89%) being placed. Highly qualified applicants who have failed to meet their conditions may find it particularly hard to find a Clearing course to meet their aspirations and will often choose to reapply in the following cycle[29].

15.4. A successful application through Clearing can be hit and miss.

- Ability to engage with the Clearing process as early as possible when vacancies are available is important, but some applicants are unable to because they are waiting for confirmation of GCSE or other results, or grade appeals.
- Some HEIs will receive tens of thousands of calls from potential applicants for Clearing places. Few HEIs have telephone systems that optimise the handling of large volumes of calls. Getting through may reflect the luck of the draw rather than the applicants' suitability for courses available.
- Applicants for Clearing places have to deal with the double distress of receiving disappointing results and then dealing with the stresses of having to make multiple telephone calls to busy admissions offices (and UCAS) to secure a place.
- Under pressure, some applicants will be making rushed choices about one of the most important decisions of their lives.
- HEIs that take a larger percentage of students through Clearing are also more likely to have higher dropout rates in the first year. This suggests that the pressure and time constraints placed upon students during this period might lead to inappropriate choices being made.

[28] Table 3 refer to Reference 12: Volume and percentage of applicants placed through Clearing.
[29] 15.3 refer to Reference 13: Analysis of Clearing volumes.

Table 4[30]: % of applicants placed through Clearing compared with the average % of applicants no longer in HE after the first year[31]

% of a HEI's total applicants through Clearing	Average % of applicants who are no longer in the HEI after the first year
0-9%	6.8%
10-14%	9.1%
15-19%	10.7%
>20%	21.1%

15.5. Quotes

"I found that I was on hold for too long during the Clearing process. This was very stressful as a place at university still wasn't confirmed."

"When I was applying last year and missed my firm offer, I had to wait to see if my insurance would accept me - it took three days for a response and when I was finally able to enter 'Clearing' inevitably everything was gone."

"In 2010 I applied through Clearing, so I applied to any relevant course, rather than ones I really wanted to go to, out of desperation for a place."

"Disgraceful, unfair and too stressful for people of such a young age. Clearing should only be allowed once EVERY applicant has received a response to their original choices."

"Clearing process isn't about who got the best grades being selected. It's about how long you can keep pressing the re-dial button for."

"I was very upset I had no help whatsoever in to what to do in Clearing and I didn't get my Clearing number until the following day of it opening so a lot of the universities that could have accepted me were full. Due to this I did not go to university this year."

15.6. Conclusion 6

A more structured and managed approach to Clearing would improve the experience for applicants and HEIs.

16. Key finding 7: There are many aspects of the admissions process which could be optimised to provide efficiencies for HEIs and benefits for applicants.

16.1. The UCAS admissions process is based on a system that was devised 50 years ago. It has been largely successful, and is appreciated by both HEIs and applicants. During this time UCAS has used advances in technology to improve its processes, for example, the introduction of Apply, Track and electronic Clearing. However, continued advances in technology mean that significant improvements could still be made.

- Many applications (over 30%) are incomplete or have missing information. Admissions staff expend significant effort chasing up references, missing data and checking qualifications. Each year, UCAS sends out 14,000 letters to applicants to clarify information provided about qualifications. At some HEIs, there are courses where as many as 50% of applications fail to meet the published minimum requirements for entry.
- The system allows for only one personal statement to support five choices.
- HEIs tell us that many references do not give the information required while schools and colleges cite the significant workload in preparing references for their students.

[30] Table 4 refer to Reference 14: Comparison of Clearing accepts and continuation rates.
[31] Table 4: Higher Education Statistics Agency Table T3a - Non-continuation following year of entry: full-time first degree entrants 2008/09 and UCAS Clearing data for 2010 year of entry.

- In spite of the online application, UCAS still prints over two million copies of applications each year which are sent to HEIs for manual review[32].
- Some awarding bodies do not submit their results through the 'Awarding Body Linkage' software which means that some decisions are made using un-validated results and manual processing.
- The UCAS system does not match results to conditional offers. For many HEIs this can still be a painstaking manual, paper-based process.
- The UCAS application does not include the facility to attach documents such as portfolios, visa documentation, certificates etc.
- HEIs are undertaking processes which could be handled more efficiently on a central basis, such as criminal convictions checks, and fee status checks for international applicants. These checks could in theory be undertaken up to five times on one applicant by five separate HEIs.
- There are numerous opportunities to reduce paper communication to applicants, schools, colleges and HEIs.
- The UCAS system cannot accommodate additional processes that individual courses might require, for example booking interviews and open days, or answering additional questions for admissions purposes.
- Some of the applicant information is duplicated across student finance and HE admissions.
- There is potential for data sharing with the UK Border Agency for international students and with other partner organisations.

16.2. Quotes

"I would like the option of altering my personal statement so I can apply to different types of courses."

"To help us differentiate between high calibre candidates it would be helpful to ask tailored questions for specific courses in the application."

"We would like to be able to view portfolios, transcripts and proof of qualifications as part of the application."

"We spend a lot of time chasing applicants for missing information which is very time consuming for admissions staff."

"UCAS could do more to help HEIs with fraud detection and verification particularly in regard to identity and qualifications."

16.3. Conclusion 7

An upgrade of the UCAS technology platform and systems provides the opportunity to improve efficiency, save cost, and improve the experience of both applicants and HEIs.

17. Key finding 8: UCAS is a one-size-fits-all system which does not optimise the process for a wider group of applicants such as international, part-time, and mature applicants; it is not easily configurable for different start dates and different intensities of study.

17.1. The basic architecture of the UCAS admissions system was designed 50 years ago to support admissions from UK domiciled school leavers most of whom had A levels or Scottish Highers and were applying for three-or four-year undergraduate courses. Today, the system needs to cope with the 16% of applicants who are not UK domiciled and the 45% of applicants who are applying with

[32] 16.1 refer to Reference 15: Admissions processing inefficiencies.

qualifications other than A levels or Scottish Highers, or who took their qualifications several years ago[33]. Also, there may be an increasing number of HEIs that have non-standard start dates, some compressed provision taking place over two years and a range of new models of provision likely to emerge following the HE White Paper[34].

- International applicants are frustrated by the UCAS deadlines which are designed around the UK academic year. 23% of EU and 45% of Non-EU applicants may currently disadvantage themselves by applying after the 15 January deadline.
- International recruiters in UK HEIs find the UCAS system a barrier to competitiveness against other countries which are able to recruit direct, for example at overseas fairs.
- International agents want to be able to add their own processes to the UCAS system.
- HEIs are individually undertaking fee status checks that could be undertaken centrally.
- Mature students who want to enrol at their local HEI are bemused by having to engage with the UCAS system when their target admissions office is on their doorstep.
- Students wishing to progress from a further education course to a higher education course at the same HEI see the UCAS system as an unnecessary barrier.
- UCAS is not currently able to support part-time admissions which would clearly benefit from a much lighter touch system and data capture.

17.2. Quotes

"We are keen to attract suitable international applicants if they can obtain a visa in the required timescale. The process should facilitate this, not impose inappropriate deadlines."

"We would like applicants to be able to apply for part-time courses as well as full time courses at the same time."

"Being told by universities that Access students would not be considered only A level students. I feel that mature students like myself were unfairly treated throughout the process, in particular the university courses in higher demand."

17.3. Conclusion 8

UCAS needs to develop flexible systems which meet the needs of its customers and a wider range of applicants.

[33] 17.1 refer to Reference 16: Diversity of UCAS applicants.
[34] 'Students at the Heart of the System' BIS, June 2011.

Section II

18. Proposals for reform

18.1. This section sets out the central proposal on which we are consulting: that there would be significant advantages in moving the process for admission to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK to one in which applications are made following receipt of results. It sets out a proposed model for a post-results system, recommends a phased approach to reform and outlines the changes that would be required to implement this system.

18.2. This would be a national initiative and despite the complexities of different examination systems and school and college term dates, any changes to the process must meet the needs of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

18.3. We recognise that a move to a post-results system would represent significant change for applicants, schools and colleges as well as for HEIs and awarding bodies. We believe it is neither possible nor desirable to introduce this level of change before 2016 year of entry at the earliest.

18.4. To help improve the process, we propose an interim solution from 2014 to 2016 year of entry. While this earlier change does not represent a fundamental reform of the current admissions process, it would introduce enhancements to the current system that improve efficiency, improve the student experience and, by making it more acceptable to apply later in the cycle, prepare for a post-results system in a phased change.

18.5. The proposed post-results process differs significantly from models put forward in the past which were based on the current UCAS system and conceived in an earlier generation of technological possibilities and without the benefit of an end-to-end process review.

18.6. We wish to consult widely on these proposals and welcome feedback in respect of fairness, widening participation and efficiency. We also want to understand the extent to which the proposals address the key problems with the current system, especially early applications, the insurance choice, the Clearing process and the use of predicted grades.

19. The current system

19.1. The centralised admissions system administered by UCAS has now served applicants and HEIs well for many years. It has many positive features that have evolved through years of experience. The system allows different timetables for applications to follow specialist courses such as medicine or veterinary medicine, as well as to Oxford and Cambridge. It is able to handle applications from those with non-traditional qualifications and has been agile in dealing with new qualifications such as the Diploma or the Welsh Baccalaureate.

19.2. Nonetheless, as is inevitable in a system that has been in existence for 50 years, there are aspects which may no longer be optimal, and the findings of our research, set out in Section I of this document, suggest that many younger applicants are asked to make choices about courses and HEIs before they are fully ready. Around half of applicants surveyed said they made choices that they weren't particularly interested in. Over 200,000 choices are cancelled or withdrawn after being processed and 34% of surveyed applicants had not undertaken any visits to HEIs prior to submitting their application[35].

20. Post-qualifications applications (PQA)

20.1. Throughout the period of the review, and indeed over many years leading up to it, influential voices have expressed support for the idea that applying with known qualifications outcomes would be fairer. This was previously known as 'PQA' and has been the subject of several widely cited reports[36]. However, recommendations for its implementation have never been acted upon and the debate about PQA has become somewhat polarised. UCAS judged it was important to undertake its process review with no pre-conceived outcome in mind; rather, that the evidence should be collected and analysed before considering solutions. The evidence set out in Section I suggests that a post-results system could offer a solution to many of the issues identified. Previous initiatives to move towards a post-results system have not proposed a fully-modelled applications and admissions process. Our proposals seek to balance the need to limit systemic disruption and change while ensuring that our model is workable and practical.

[35] 19.2 refer to Reference 3 and Reference 6.
[36] Eg Admissions to Higher Education Review: Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice, 2004.

21. Developing proposals

21.1. In developing our proposals for reform in response to the findings in Section I, the UCAS Admissions Process Review Team went through a series of exercises to develop models for a reformed admissions process that would address the key conclusions from the review phase.

21.2. The following list of variables was developed and potential changes to each of them considered:

- number of choices
- ranking of choices
- parallel v sequential applications
- course selection (as opposed to HEI selection)
- insurance choices
- firm offer dates
- start dates
- application cycle deadlines
- current process enhancements
- variable application pathways.

21.3. Based on the analysis of the variables, the team developed various models for the admissions process. In addition to testing these against the principles, the models were tested with groups of admissions practitioners who helped refine and develop them.

21.4. At one extreme, a whole set of new 'rules' was developed to try to remove variables that affected fairness for applicants and/or created inefficiencies for HEIs. At the other, a completely open and flexible model was developed on the basis that every new rule introduced would create new opportunities to 'game' the system. Variations of these models were tested and refined. On the whole, they were found simply to replace one set of problems with another.

22. The proposed model

22.1. Unlike other attempts to reform the admissions process, we are putting forward a fully-modelled process to indicate how the new process could work whilst limiting disruption to current academic timetables. There is still a lot of detail to be worked up and this is not a technical consultation. However, we believe there is sufficient detail to enable key stakeholders to understand how the proposals would affect their part of the process and to obtain views, concerns and suggestions for amendments. If the proposals are accepted it is expected that a technical consultation will follow.

22.2. It is not possible to implement a post-results system without a change to the current timetable of admissions. However, we believe the changes are manageable and are shared by all the key elements in the process. A level examinations would have to start three weeks earlier though less change would be needed to other examinations, for instance Scottish Highers or the IB. Results would need to be available by early July and before the end of term for most schools and colleges, allowing time to fine-tune applications based on known grades. We acknowledge that this poses greater challenges in Scotland and Northern Ireland than elsewhere. We propose giving applicants two parallel choices initially, with further sequential applications for those unsuccessful in the first round. This model would allow the process to be completed in time for some universities to retain their term start dates though some would need to shift several weeks later to early October.

Applicant research

22.3. A robust research phase is critical to the success of a post-results application system and should begin in the early stages of secondary education. Potential applicants are supported by schools and advisers and are encouraged to use UCAS Course Finder to explore a wide range of potential options.

22.4. Applicants would sign up for their 'myucas' account (a portal designed for UCAS end users, including applicants, members, parents and schools) to gain their UCAS number and to access tailored advice and support services. The services would be customised according to applicant group, recognising the different needs of diverse applicants including part-time, mature and international.

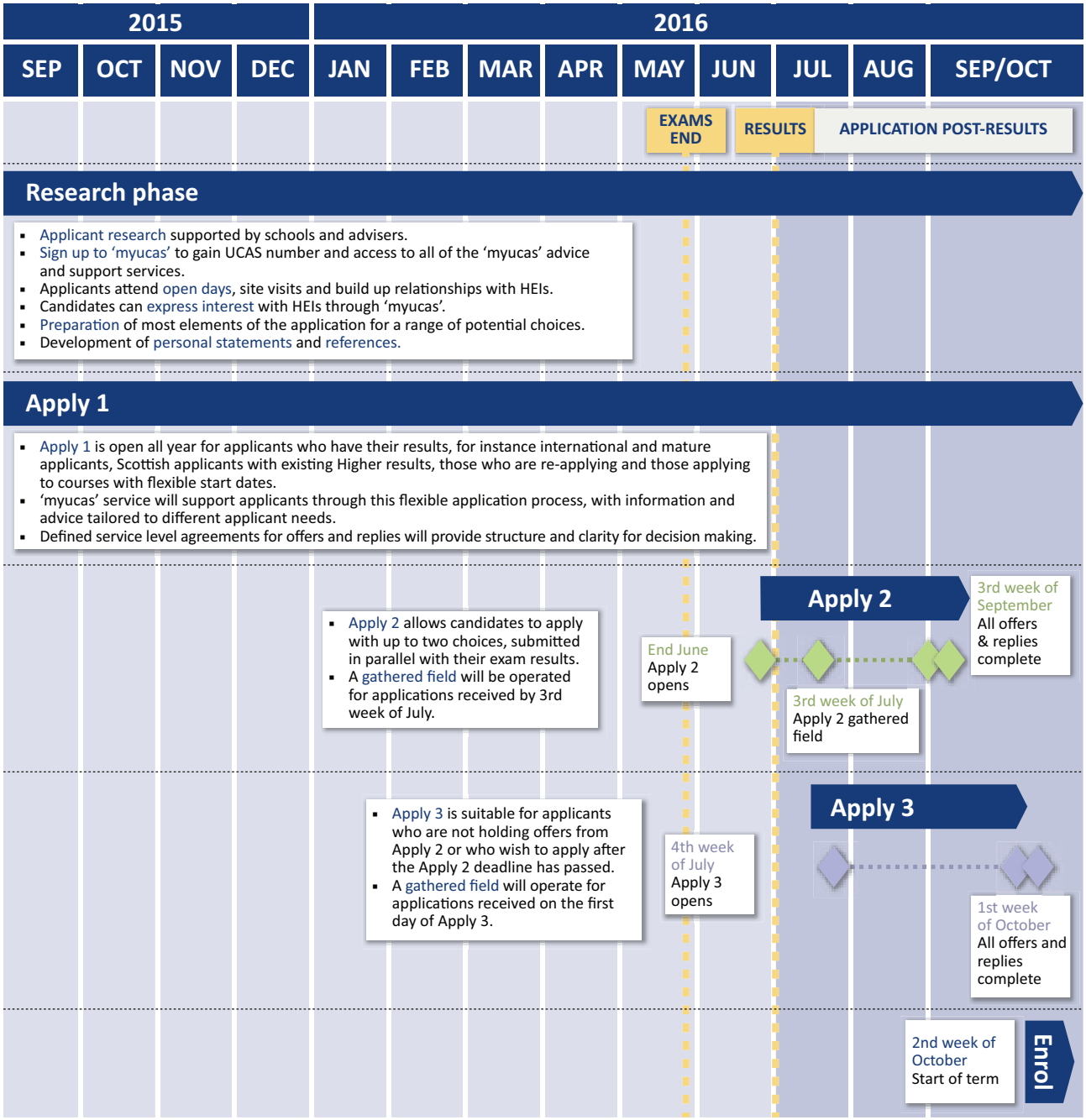
22.5. Students would use a common portal to register with UCAS and apply for their student finance. This streamlined and integrated application process would provide applicants with an early, indicative decision on finance, information that would form a key part of their research and decision making.

22.6. On 'myucas', applicants would start to build up a shortlist of courses and HEIs of interest to them. The system would facilitate contact with HEIs and push information about open days and site visits to enable applicants and HEIs to start to build relationships. Depending on the subject interest expressed by the applicants, they may be sent information about relevant admissions tests which they may be required to take prior to submitting an application.

22.7. Applicants could engage with 'myucas' at any stage in their research journey. For applicants awaiting results, this would result in an extended research phase during which decisions remain open. During this phase, and as they narrow down their choices, applicants would start building the elements of their application, including portfolios if required, and be encouraged to prepare for a range of potential options depending on the outcomes of their exams.

22.8. During the applicant research phase, members (through the UCAS portal) would have access to a range of products and services that will allow them to gauge the level of interest in their HEI and courses from potential applicants. As applicants start to narrow down their choices, real-time information would be passed to members allowing them to estimate numbers that might be applying when they get their results.

Diagram 3: A post-results system of application (2016 year of entry)



Apply

22.9. The application phase would be structured round three distinct Apply windows depending on the individual circumstances of the applicant. Each window would have set open and close dates, but common to each is the requirement that applications be submitted only once the applicant has met the entry requirements for the course for which they wish to apply.

Apply 1

22.10. Apply 1 would be open throughout the cycle for applicants who already have their results or appropriate entry qualifications. These could be mature applicants, Scottish applicants (who already have appropriate results in Highers from S5, their penultimate year in school), international applicants (whose academic year may be different from the UK) or those who have deferred entry for a year.

22.11. Apply 1 would provide a fully flexible process, allowing applications at any point in the year. The initial proposal is that applications would be made to one HEI at time in Apply 1. However, we are also considering allowing two parallel choices during Apply 1. There would be defined service level agreements (SLAs) for offers and replies to ensure that applicants and HEIs could receive decisions in a timely manner.

22.12. Applicants who have a combination of completed and pending qualifications would have the option of applying either in Apply 1 or Apply 2. In either case, the HEI's decision would be based on the qualifications achieved at the time of application. Scottish applicants, for example, could apply with their achieved Higher results in Apply 1 or with additional, Advanced Highers in Apply 2.

Apply 2

22.13. As the main part of the cycle, Apply 2 is intended for applicants who have taken qualifications such as A levels, Scottish Highers, IB, Welsh Baccalaureate, Diplomas, BTECs or other vocational courses in the year of admission, and are intending to start a course in that October.

22.14. Apply 2 would open at the start of the fourth week in June. This means that most school and college applicants would have some time before the end of the school term for support and guidance from teachers and to finalise their applications based on known results. Applicants could apply to two choices for which they have met the specified academic requirements and could submit different personal statements for each. We understand that only two choices might be limiting and welcome your views on whether two is the right number.

22.15. Results for most applicants would be available to the HEIs they apply to using the Awarding Body Linkage; for others, the facility to upload copies of the certificates or results letters would speed up submission.

22.16. There would be an equal consideration deadline at the start of the third week in July. Applicants would still be able to apply through Apply 2 after the equal consideration deadline. The end of the second week in September would be the deadline by which all decisions would need to be made for applications received in Apply 2.

22.17. This gives a nine-week decision-making period for HEIs. Those wishing to interview candidates or undertake additional selection methods would do so during this period. Once a decision had been made, the applicant would be notified of the decision, with all offers and replies being complete by the end of the third week in September.

Apply 3

22.18. Apply 3 would be open from the fourth week in July to the first week in October for those not holding any offers from Apply 2 or for those who are applying after Apply 2 has closed. Applicants would apply to one HEI at a time, with a gathered field[37] operating on the first day of Apply 3.

23. Benefits of a post-results system of application

Fairness

23.1. The most fundamental difference between a post-results system and the present system is that applicants would not make formal applications until they had received their results. HEIs would make judgements based on actual grades achieved and not on predicted grades. It would remove unpredictability from the process which applicants find confusing and stressful.

23.2. The evidence of over- and under-prediction of grades for applicants, and the evidence relating to how HEIs actually use predicted grades, highlighted in Section I, leads to the conclusion that for most HEIs, an applicant's predicted grades do no more than put them in the 'ball-park' for admission to a particular course. The reality is that HEIs are, for a great many applicants, able to flex the system such that they are, in effect, making offers based on known results at Confirmation stage with the predicted grades simply providing them with a pool of applicants that they might wish to admit and who are committed to enrolling at their HEI if offered a place.

23.3. The predicted grade system has worked well for many applicants - 67% of applicants with a conditional firm choice pre-Confirmation are accepted. However, given that predicted grades, which are made at least five months prior to the examinations taking place, may have a significant impact on the choices that applicants make, the fact that fewer than 10% receive accurate predictions across three grades is worrying because up to 90% of applicants might have made different application choices had their predictions been accurate[38].

23.4. Having said that, it is important to emphasise that the proposed system would not rely on results alone. The UK HE admissions process has always been characterised by its holistic approach and admissions decisions will continue to be based upon assessment of latent talent and potential as well as prior achievement. As now, applicants would submit a personal statement supported by a reference, with the advantage that these are tailored to applications for specific HEIs. Some HEIs might choose to request additional material specific to a particular course and this functionality would be built into the system. HEIs would still be able to take contextual information into account where appropriate, with the added confidence of knowing what the applicant has achieved. Work would need to be done with the sector to consider transparent ways that allow contextual and other data to be considered for applications from more disadvantaged applicants.

23.5. During the academic year prior to application, applicants would be encouraged to undertake research on HEIs, attend open days and visits and prepare many aspects of their application, increasing the amount of time available for these important activities. This has the added advantage of attendance at open days taking place before applications are made and not afterwards as often is the case at present. This will help applicants build up a relationship with their preferred HEI and other potential students and allow them to make more informed choices when they apply.

[37] Gathered field: Decisions on applications are deferred until the specified closing date.
[38] 23.3 refer to Reference 9: Predicted grades.

23.6. Questions

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

23.6.1.A system of application post-results would deliver a fairer admissions process because the applicant would submit actual results and the reliance on predicted grades would be removed.
23.6.2.Applying post-results will not necessarily have positive impacts on equality and diversity.
23.6.3.Two choices is an adequate number for Apply 2, allowing applicants both an aspirational and a more realistic application.
23.6.4.A system of application post-results may encourage a mechanistic approach to admissions with contextual and other data used less effectively.
23.6.5.The lack of flexibility in the proposed post-results system may mean that HEIs are forced to reject candidates they might have accepted in the current system.
23.6.6.Giving young applicants more time to make application decisions recognises how much they mature over the final year at school or college.
23.6.7. A post-results system will not be agile enough to provide a better experience for all groups of students - those with A levels, those with Scottish Highers and those with other academic or vocational qualifications.
23.6.8 We would welcome views about any particular group of students whose needs would be less well met in a post-result system.

24. Widening participation

24.1. Widening participation may be accelerated if we have a fairer, more transparent and simpler system with applicants clear at the point of application whether they meet the minimum academic requirements for a course.

24.2. It would also help if neither they nor their families have to go through the anxiety of waiting for an offer once in the spring and again post-results, followed for some by the complexities of the Clearing system.

24.3. Giving applicants from families where there is not a tradition of university entrance an extra six to ten months to mature, learn more about their preferred HEIs and prepare applications would encourage more confident and informed applications. These young people are often on a faster upward trajectory during their final year of Level 3 studies than their more advantaged peers and it is at the application stage, not the decision stage, that many young people exclude themselves from courses and HEIs with higher entry requirements.

24.4. The more complex territory relates to the extent to which some types of applicants might be disadvantaged by the unreliability of predicted grades. While the preponderance of over-prediction may encourage more disadvantaged applicants to make aspirational applications they might not otherwise have made, disadvantage potentially stems both from over- or under-prediction. This may be exacerbated by the presence or absence of knowledgeable advice about which applications may succeed based on predicted and then real results.

24.5. There is justifiable concern that a compressed decision-making period would be against the interests of less advantaged applicants, giving HEIs less time for a careful sifting of applications and the use of contextual and other information to identify latent talent and potential.

24.6. It is for this reason that an integral part of the proposed process is an extended research phase, giving both applicants and HEIs the opportunity to build up relationships over time. Additional time to prepare applications and target them to specific HEIs would give applicants a better opportunity to illustrate those other experiences, skills, perspectives and achievements which, in addition to examination results, demonstrate their suitability for a course. Advice and guidance can focus more on these constructive activities and less on the tactics of application.

24.7. We understand that this is a crucial and complex area. However, the HE sector is committed to widening participation and we believe this proposed model has the potential both to remove barriers and to provide

incentives for those applicants who lack self-confidence in the present process.

24.8. Questions

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

24.8.1.A wider group of applicants would be encouraged to make more aspirational applications with the confidence of knowing they have achieved appropriate qualification results.
24.8.2.Applicants would be deterred from making aspirational applications by having to make decisions quickly and being restricted to two choices.
24.8.3.Applicants may not understand the importance of contextual data and would be deterred from applying for some courses if they have not achieved the grades.
24.8.4.Widening participation would be supported by more constructive and focussed advice and guidance.
24.8.5.How do you think a system of application post-results could be managed to enable it to promote widening participation?

25. Efficiency improvements

25.1. The proposed model creates a number of efficiencies for applicants, HEIs and UCAS by removing the workload required to make conditional offers based on predicted grades. HEIs can make and applicants can accept unconditional offers, making the need for insurance and firm choices for applicants unnecessary. Removing the need for 'security' choices within the system dramatically reduces the complexity of the system for applicants and the volume of processing for HEIs[39].

25.2. As was shown in paragraph 9, we estimate that HEIs currently process 9.3 million transactions at a cost of approximately £26m to place 487,300 applicants. However, by removing the complexity of applying with predicted grades we believe this could be reduced to 2.2 million transactions costing nearer to £8m across the sector to place the same number of applicants.

25.3. We estimate that 115,000 applicants apply with results and could be placed through Apply 1 (17% of total applicants). These applicants currently apply directly to HEIs (23,000) or through the main scheme and make unconditional firm choices before Confirmation (92,000)[40].

25.4. By removing these applicants from the main application window, Apply 2 (previously main scheme) we will spread the level of activity more evenly throughout the year and allow HEIs to begin filling places earlier in the cycle.

25.5. The remaining 582,000 applicants would apply in Apply 2. We would estimate 366,000 (63%) to be placed, based on applicant flows through the current model.

25.6. For instance, we estimate that the 318,000 applicants who were placed at their conditional firm or insurance choice would be placed through Apply 2.

25.7. In addition, the 7,300 Extra and Adjustment applicants would benefit from clarity about their grade outcomes when making their application choices and be placed in the main application window. This would also remove the additional processing that is currently required to allow additional applications for these groups of applicants.

25.8. Those expected to be placed in Apply 2 also include 40,600 applicants who currently apply to Clearing. There are 9,000 applicants who currently apply directly to Clearing without engaging in the main scheme who would now be able to apply in the main application window. The 31,600 applicants who had a firm choice before entering Clearing (but did not meet the conditions of the offer at Confirmation) would also benefit being able to make more informed application choices.

[39] 25.2 refer to Reference 4: HEI transactions and indicative cost to process admissions.
[40] 25.3 to 25.11 refer to Reference 17: Efficiencies under the 2016 year of entry model.

25.9. Processing efficiency in Apply 2 would be vastly improved compared to the main scheme in the current model. As 17% of applicants would already have been placed in Apply 1 and the number of initial choices would be reduced from five to two, the number of applications requiring processing would be reduced from 2.7 million to 1.2 million.

25.10. Under the current model HEIs must process firm and insurance acceptances from applicants to their offers and then confirm the conditions of the offer have been met at Confirmation. However, under the proposed model HEIs could make unconditional offers (as grade outcomes are known) and therefore acceptance by the applicant would act as confirmation of the place. Removing this complexity in the offer and acceptance process is expected to eliminate an estimated 3.2 million transactions from the process.

25.11. Following Apply 2, there would be an estimated 6,500 places available through Apply 3. This compares with the 47,000 places that are currently available in Clearing. This would dramatically reduce the number of HEIs that need to fill places at the end of the cycle and the associated costs incurred by HEIs by doing so.

25.12. A number of peripheral efficiencies would also be created by technological improvements to the IT system that is used to administer the admissions system:

- The shorter application cycle would allow fewer technical releases (currently on average there are five releases a year for each core product) which would therefore lower system maintenance costs.
- Improved validation and verification of applications would reduce the time HEIs spend on assessing invalid applications (incomplete applications, inappropriate entry qualifications), and speed up decision-making.
- Additional shared services would deliver efficiencies in the admissions process, significantly reducing the time spent on checking the same applicant data across multiple HEIs such as the fee status, CRB checks and health checks of applicants.

Applicant efficiencies

25.13. The applicant experience would be improved as information would be 'pushed' to applicants at key points in the process and the application process itself would be more straightforward to navigate.

25.14. Applicants would not have to make applications to up to five HEIs in the knowledge that, at best, they can only accept two offers; nor would they be required to make difficult decisions about appropriate firm and insurance choices in the context of unknown results. Instead they would apply initially to one or two HEIs with the certainty that their results meet the stated minimum academic entry requirements.

25.15. Clear deadline dates and SLAs would ensure applicants are aware of when they will receive decisions, reducing enquiries with regard to the tracking of their application.

25.16. Enquiries about deadline dates, confusing terminology, conditions of offers, unsuccessful applications, applicants changing their minds, tracking decisions, and assurance calls would reduce, freeing up valuable resource at HEIs and UCAS.

Adviser efficiencies

25.17. A more straightforward and easily-understood process would reduce the amount of support and guidance that applicants need at the outset about the mechanics of the process. Instead, advisers would be able to tailor support to applicants throughout the cycle, helping them develop and refine their proposed choices. Advisers would be able to write

references with the greater assurance of known academic outcomes and would be able to offer tailored advice to applicants once results have been achieved. Advisers will be able to track the progress of applications with the reassurance of firm decision deadlines and the knowledge that, once an offer has been made, it is not pending the outcome of future examinations.

25.18. Questions

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

25.18.1. A post-results system is an efficient system as fewer applications require processing by HEIs.
25.18.2. A more efficient streamlined process would enable HEIs to make financial savings.
25.18.3 A more streamlined process would make the process easier for applicants to navigate.
25.18.4. What disadvantages in terms of process efficiency, if any, could be experienced by HEIs, applicants or advisers as a result of a post-results system?

26. International and part-time students

26.1. The higher education sector is currently undergoing considerable change, for example with initiatives outlined in the recent White Paper expected to attract new providers and drive expansion into increasingly diverse applicant markets in England. As some HEIs consider developing their business models, so the admissions process must adapt by connecting a more diverse applicant market to new models of HE delivery.

26.2. Even in the current market, our research identified that the current 'one-size-fits-all' admissions process does not always suit the needs of international and part-time applicants. Inflexibility of deadlines, inability to cope with variable start dates, and perceived complexity of the process were all cited as reasons why applicants may prefer to apply directly to their chosen HEI rather than navigate the central UCAS system. Additionally, there is currently no centralised service for part-time students, who have no alternative but to contact HEIs individually, both for information and in order to make an application. Our research indicates that there is support for the development of some form of centralised provision for part-time applications, not least to provide an in-cycle data set about applicants and application patterns, but further work needs to be undertaken to understand this more fully.

26.3. An increase in distance and blended learning provision may result in part-time study becoming less localised. Therefore, an admissions service's ability to respond to increased demand from part-time applicants for access to a wider range of providers will become increasingly important.

26.4. Although our emphasis had been on improving the process for the UK full-time undergraduate market, we believe that with improved technology, the new process will have benefits for international and part-time students also. The facility in Apply 1 to make applications throughout the academic year will give international and part-time students more time and the flexibility to make complete applications appropriate to the course they are applying for.

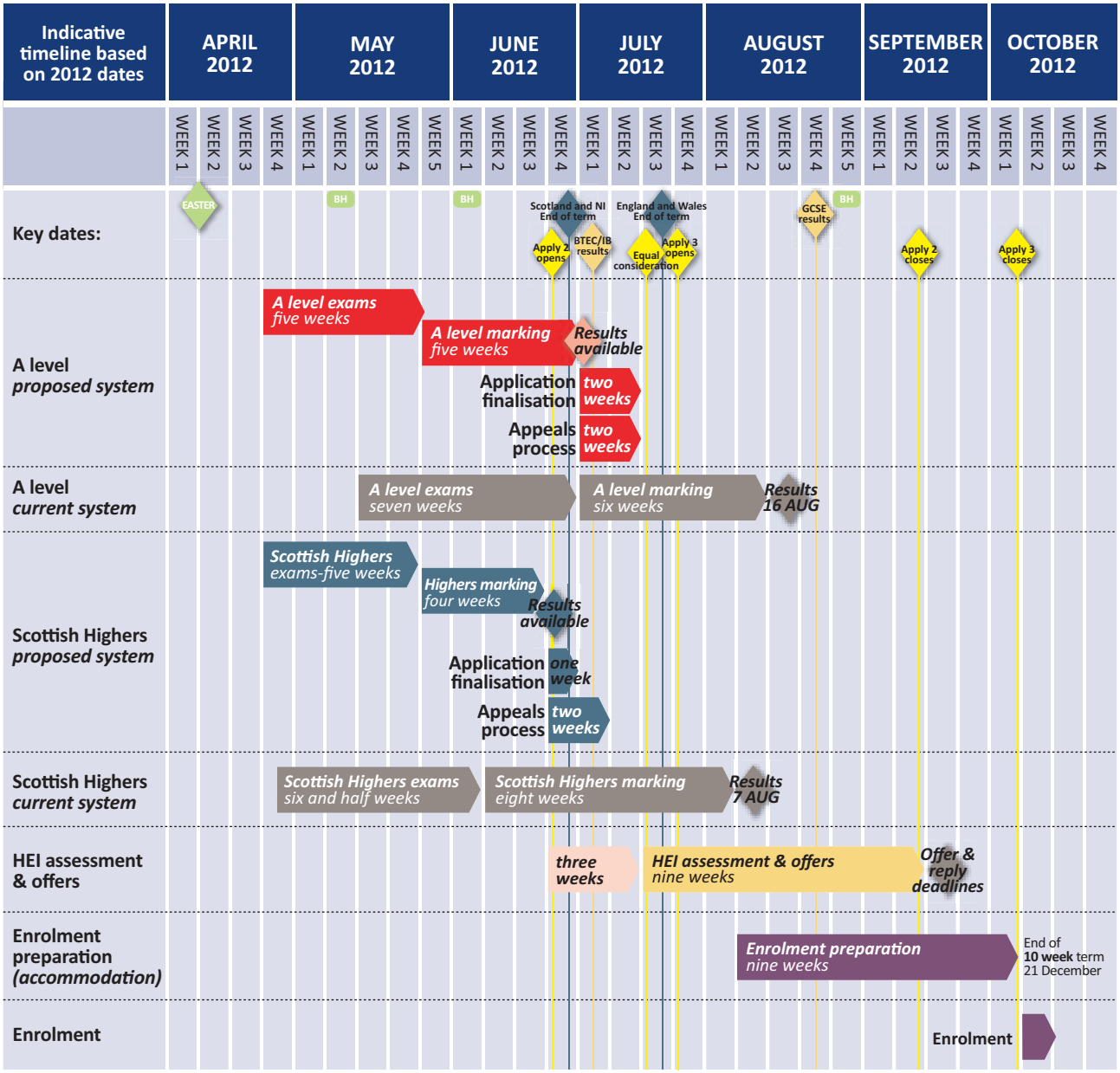
26.5. Questions

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

26.5.1.It is desirable for international applicants to apply through a centralised system and not direct to HEIs.
26.5.2.It is desirable for part-time applicants to apply through a centralised system and not direct to HEIs.
26.5.3.Access to improved data about international and part-time applications will be a benefit of being part of a central admissions service.
26.5.4.The proposed new process has the capacity to offer greater flexibilities which will support international and part-time admissions.

27. Examination, results and applications timetable under the proposed model

Diagram 4: Examination, results and applications timetable



27.1. Our proposed post-results system is modelled to preserve and enhance the time HEIs need to build relationships with potential applicants; to ensure that decisions are holistic not mechanistic and that the timetable is not rushed and comfortably accommodates the work that needs to be done by both applicants and HEIs.

27.2. Our proposals would involve shifts in the current examinations and results timetable which do raise some issues that need to be addressed. It would also require an adjustment to the delivery of the curriculum in schools and colleges and may have implications for the start date of some university and college courses. In developing a process model for post-results admissions we acknowledge that a strength of the current system is that it allows the development of a lengthy relationship building interaction with applicants. This has an advantage in measuring both the commitment of applicants to their chosen course and their genuine familiarity with its features, content and demands before they make such a commitment. The current process has additional advantages in allowing time for interviews, visits and other conversion activities.

27.3. We are mindful of the fact that there are some courses and HEIs where the process is even more complex. These are courses like medicine, music, nursing, initial teacher training, art and design and HEIs which rely more heavily on interviews, auditions or the submission of portfolios. We would like to move as closely as possible to a single system but would not want to impose a 'one-size- fits-all' model to the detriment of some. We will work closely with providers of these courses and HEIs to understand how best their specific needs might be met within a post-results admissions model.

27.4. We believe that the technological developments already underway in UCAS will fully support the new processes. A new initiative will encourage potential applicants to engage at an early stage in their research phase and will give a clearer and more personalised picture of the choices open to them when searching for their ideal course, filtered by factors that are important to individuals such as graduate employability, location, subject, cost etc. Applicants will also be able to use the service to express an interest in an individual HEI and specific courses. UCAS will supply HEIs with this market intelligence to provide clarity about the potential pool of applicants as it evolves throughout the admissions cycle. In addition, it will enable HEIs to target their marketing efforts to individual applicants and tailor their message to their course interests.

27.5. Previous models developed for PQA had proposed a pre-registration period with the applications being formalised following receipt of results. We modelled this system but drew the conclusion that there would be a risk that it would quickly become too similar to the current predicted grade/conditional offer system with HEIs making informal or verbal offers and compiling waiting lists. If this were to happen, the experience for applicants would not change markedly but they would lose the assurance of contractually binding firm and insurance choices. We also considered a 'post-qualifications offer' model (PQO) where the system would run on similar lines to the current process but with offers only made post-results. This was rejected for the same reasons as the pre-registration model.

27.6. We were also conscious of previous arguments relating to significant changes in the examinations timetable and the start date for most HE courses. We have tried to limit the changes as far as possible.

27.7. Our proposed model for application post-results does require a shift in the examinations timetable which mainly affects A level candidates but would have less impact on those following Scottish Higher, International Baccalaureate or BTEC and other vocational courses. It would also require a change in the date for publication of results.

27.8. The model does not currently propose more than a limited change to university start dates. However, initial discussions with some HEIs have suggested that a start date of late October (for first year students only) might be manageable. A later HEI start date would allow results to become available later than currently proposed in early August but no schools would be in session and it would be in the middle of the traditional holiday period. We believe that there would be no significant gains in terms of school or college term dates or the examination results timetable by shifting the first term start date later than currently proposed, although it would allow more time for further rounds in Apply 3.

27.9. We also considered the more radical approach of asking HEIs to move their start date to January. This had been rejected in PQA proposals in the past and we agreed that the joint hurdle of the loss of a full term's HE teaching and a six month hiatus for applicants were too difficult to overcome. Many HEIs we spoke to also cited a potential loss of international competitiveness were the sector to move to an academic year out of synch with the rest of the world. We would, however, welcome your insights into whether either of the above options are worthy of further consideration.

28. Timetable challenges

Delivery, examinations and results

28.1. The A level teaching period would need to end 15 days earlier than at present.

28.2. The examination period would need to be confined to five weeks which represents a small reduction to the current arrangements.

28.3. This means there would be less time available for marking, grading and communication of results. There would be a window of 35 days from the end of the examination period to the publication of results. For schools in England and Wales, five working days of this period would be summer half term. Initial feedback from awarding bodies has suggested that the marking and awarding process could be compressed without any loss of quality, especially given sufficient lead time to refine the necessary processes.

28.4. A level results would be available by the first week of July, the same time as IB and Welsh Baccalaureate results are currently available. Scottish Higher results would need to be available at the same time, or earlier, if an end of term date at the end of June is retained. The deadline for applications for equal consideration would be at the start of the third week in July. This would allow schools and colleges to give advice and guidance to finalise applications after results are published but within current term time. We appreciate that this is not the case in Northern Ireland and we would want to understand how the specific challenges there could be addressed. Activity associated with offers to applicants would take place during the third week in September.

28.5. There are no proposed changes to the appeals process but there will be a longer time between the publication of results and the start of the university term for the processing of appeals.

28.6. A small number of applicants need confirmation of Level 2 and other results. Unless the timetable for these is also changed, this may disadvantage these candidates though they would have the opportunity to take such qualifications at an earlier sitting. It may be possible to design a conditional offer for this group of students.

28.7. Questions

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

28.7.1.The changes to the examination timetable should not have a major impact on the accuracy of assessment; with appropriate changes to their systems, awarding bodies should be able to maintain accuracy and rigour in a shorter marking period.
28.7.2.The option of starting the HE term for first year students in late October is worthy of consideration.
28.7.3.The option of starting the HE term for first year students in January is worthy of consideration.
28.7.4.The resources available in schools and colleges will be sufficient to give students support to make applications and manage offers in the timescale proposed.
28.7.5 What provisions could be made within the educational and qualification structures in Scotland to make a UK system of application post-results workable for Scottish students?
28.7.6 What steps could be taken to secure parity for Northern Irish applicants whose school term currently ends at the end of June?

29. Proposed timetable changes

HEI start dates and processes

29.1. HEIs currently have start dates for most courses which range from mid-September to mid-October. The proposed model would require universities and colleges to adhere to an earliest start date of circa 8 October. This allows for a ten-week term to be completed before Christmas. It may be difficult to compress teaching for some courses, such as nursing and those with work placement preparation.

29.2. Under the current admissions process, HEI admissions activity peaks between October and February as the UCAS 'Apply' system opens in September and most offers have been made by early April. There is an additional peak, mainly for those HEIs that engage with Clearing, between A level results day and the end of August when the majority of applicants have been accepted or rejected. A post-results system would shift the bulk of admissions processing to a period of six weeks between late July and early September; typically during the summer holiday period. It would also push activity in respect of accommodation and student finance into the period between late August, when HEIs begin to make offers, and the beginning of term. However, as the proposed post-results process significantly reduces the overall number of applications, we believe the change is workable.

29.3. We understand there would be particular pressure on those HEIs and courses which interview applicants. This activity would either need to take place over the July-August period or an exception made to allow it to take place before the final application date. Initial discussions with such HEIs suggest that, with planning, it is possible to complete interviewing during the July-August period.

29.4. There would also be significant challenge for those HEIs which require auditions or the production of portfolios. We need to understand better how these can be best addressed.

Questions

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

29.4.1. An earliest start date of circa 8 October for first year students would not have a serious impact on the delivery of HE courses.
29.4.2. Universities could make appropriate resources available to make offer decisions and process applications between mid-July and end August.
29.4.3. We would welcome suggestions about what needs to be done to ensure that interviews can be successfully completed within the proposed model of applications post-results.
29.4.4. We would welcome suggestions how to accommodate applications for courses requiring auditions or the submissions of portfolios.

30. 2014 Year of entry process enhancements

30.1. Because applicants would need to know the process and timetable for HE admissions before starting their Level 3 curriculum, the process would need to be agreed and publicised two years before implementation. Schools, colleges, and awarding bodies, would need time to prepare for the changes in the examination timetable. We therefore believe that the earliest implementation date for a post-results admissions system is for entry to higher education in 2016, that is, for students starting Year 12 in England and Wales, S5 in Scotland and Year 13 in Northern Ireland in September 2014.

Improving the system – a phased approach

30.2. As outlined previously, the Admissions Process Review Team identified many aspects of the current admissions process that could be improved, some of which can be addressed without making fundamental changes. We outline below enhancements to the current process that we believe will improve efficiency, fairness, offer a better applicant experience and will also ensure that, if a post-results system is introduced for 2016, the process operates as smoothly and efficiently as possible. These improvements simplify the application process for applicants, introduce three clear application 'windows' with defined deadlines for offers and replies, and provide a clearer structure for the Clearing process (re-named Apply 3).

30.3. We believe the changes we have identified can be introduced safely for 2014 year of entry. They rely on the following assumptions:

- UCAS develops a new technology platform
- HEIs move to paperless or 'paperlite' management of admissions.

Research phase

30.4. Applicants would be encouraged to explore higher education options at an early stage in their secondary education, with information available through an online tool to inform GCSE and equivalent level qualifications subject choice, as well as guiding A level and equivalent selection.

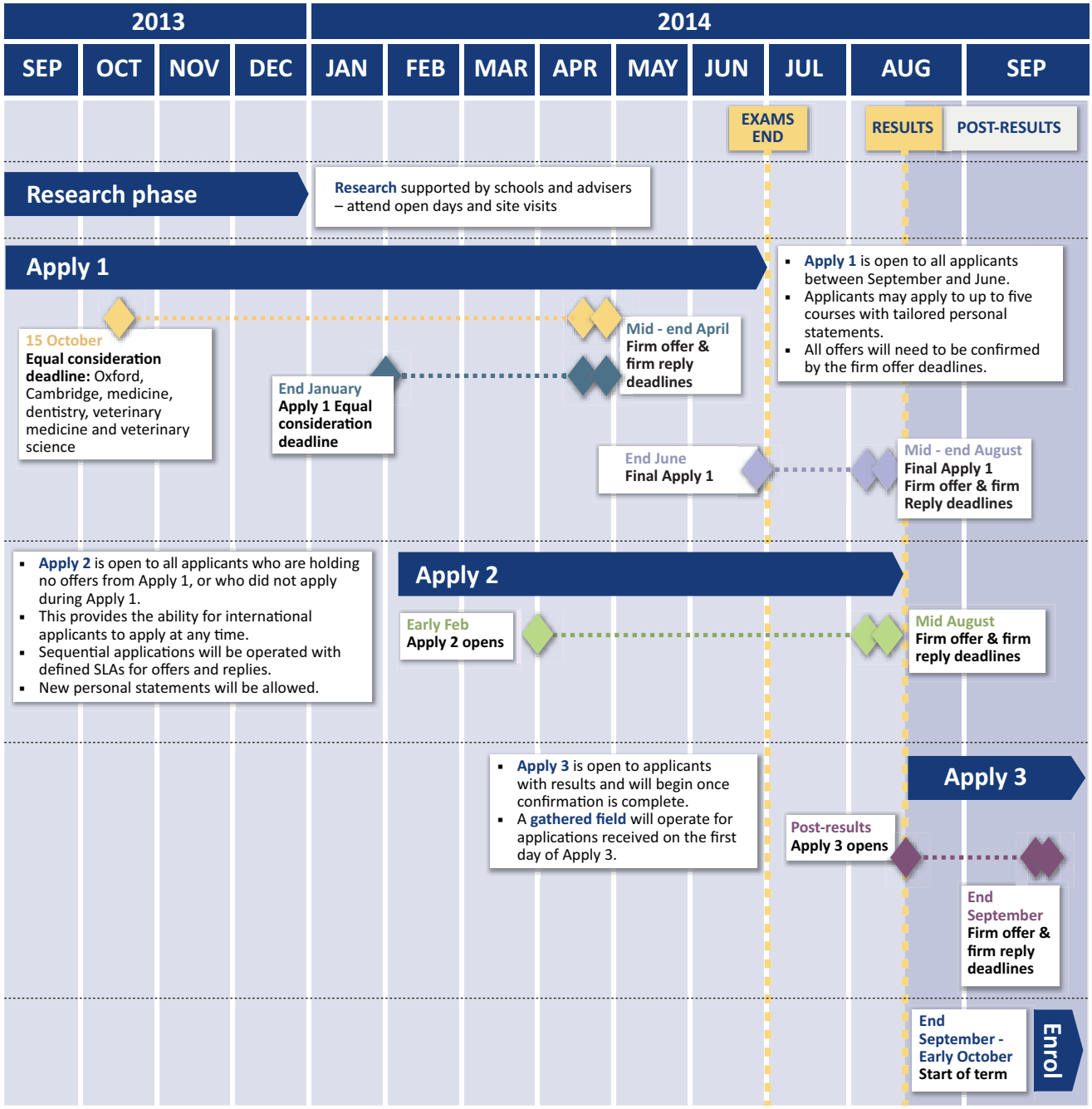
30.5. A wide range of course information and advice would be available through UCAS Course Finder enabling applicants to search for courses which fulfil specific criteria in relation to location, entry requirements, subject, fee level, career choice and other relevant factors.

30.6. Information would be tailored appropriately to particular applicant groups such as international, mature, part-time.

30.7. During the research phase, applicants would build up a shortlist of HEIs and courses to which they wish to apply.

30.8. Personalised information would be pushed to applicants (and HEIs) at appropriate stages through the research and application phase.

Diagram 5: Admissions process 2014 year of entry model



Apply 1

30.9. Apply 1 would be open to applicants from September for entry the following autumn. An enhanced Apply process would guide applicants through an online application, using easily-understood terminology and reducing the risk of entering incorrect information by validation of the qualification information entered, increased use of drop-down menus with appropriate choices, and mandatory completion of fields to reduce invalid applications and follow up by admissions offices. Applicants could, as now, make up to five choices, with more than one personal statement if different course choices are made. They could support their application with uploaded documentation such as certificates and passport copies.

30.10. Applicants could be encouraged through flags and warnings to select a range of aspirational and more realistic choices in relation to their achieved and predicted results. Applicants proceeding with applications for which they appear not to meet the minimum entry requirements could be flagged to HEIs. HEIs would be able to use tailored questions for applicants and referees and could request uploaded portfolios or other selection tools to facilitate their decision-making process. Improved centralised data capture, such as around fee status, which reduces multiple processing by HEIs, would be introduced.

30.11. Applicants would benefit from a more streamlined and integrated application process for higher education and student finance. UCAS is already working with the Student Loans Company (SLC) and with the Student Awards Agency for Scotland to deliver an improved application portal for 2014 year of entry.

30.12. As in the current model, there would be an early equal consideration deadline of 15 October for Oxford or Cambridge, and for all medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine/science courses.

30.13. There would be an equal consideration deadline of the third Friday in January for all other courses; applicants who miss this deadline would have a second opportunity to apply before 30 June.

30.14. We would like to consult on a single date for all offers to be made. This would encourage a gathered field approach, reduce perceived pressure on applicants to submit their applications early and remove anxiety for applicants who are waiting for responses. Applicants would be given a firm reply deadline which gives HEIs increased certainty in relation to number management.

Apply 2

30.15. Apply 2 (in effect a replacement for the current 'Extra' process) would be open from February to August for applicants either not holding any offers or holding only one offer from Apply 1, irrespective of how many choices they made originally. This would provide increased opportunities for applicants to obtain a satisfactory offer. New applicants may also choose to apply through Apply 2, particularly those applying after the end of June when Apply 1 closes; this means that there is increased flexibility for international applicants who may adhere to a different academic timetable. Different delivery models could also be accommodated, for example part-time, where applicants may wish to apply closer to a course start, and non-standard start dates.

30.16. In Apply 2, applicants would apply to one choice at a time, with a new personal statement if they choose, and may continue until they hold either an unconditional offer, or have received two conditional offers which they can accept as firm and insurance.

30.17. There would be defined service level agreements for offers and replies.

Confirmation

30.18. An improved service matching offers to results by UCAS would speed up the Confirmation process, along with an increased range of results available through the Awarding Body Linkage facility. Confirmation decisions would be made on all offers for which results have been received within a specified time limit after which finalised vacancy lists are published. Applicants would be informed on Track and by text or email about the status of their application, reducing phone calls to HEIs and UCAS. No applications can be made during Confirmation.

30.19. In the present system there is a range of dates over which relevant exam results are released through July and August. It would be preferable for as many results as possible to be released on a single results day in August; however, if this is not achievable, then, as currently, there would be an earlier Confirmation period in Scotland. Applicants with earlier results can apply for courses for which there are advertised vacancies.

30.20. There would be a short gap between Confirmation and Apply 3 (the replacement for Clearing) opening to allow time for HEIs to confirm places and more time for applicants who have not been placed to consider their options.

30.21. All conditional offers (firm and insurance) would be processed before Apply 3 opens so HEIs know how many vacancies they have.

Apply 3

30.22. Apply 3 would be open to applicants who have not been placed through Confirmation or who are new applicants with results.

30.23. Courses open in Apply 3 would be either those with unfilled places after Confirmation, or places which HEIs have elected to 'hold back' for application in Apply 3 in order to support later application, to attract AAB+[41] applicants or to start to move towards a post-results application model.

30.24. After Confirmation, vacancy lists would be published along with an indication of the number of places available and the minimum entry requirements. When Apply 3 opens, applicants would submit an application through UCAS to one course of their choice. Applicants could submit a revised personal statement if they chose to in support of their application. All applications would be forwarded by UCAS to HEIs at the end of day one of Apply 3 for consideration as a gathered field. We propose that applications submitted to UCAS after the first day of Apply 3 are forwarded to HEIs as they are received.

30.25. HEIs would notify applicants of the outcome of their application within an agreed timescale. Applicants would have the option to release themselves and apply to another HEI or course if they are not notified of a decision by an HEI to which they have submitted an application. If there is an unavoidable delay, for example if a face-to-face interview is required, HEIs would notify the applicant so they can decide whether to wait or to withdraw and seek a place on another course.

30.26. Unsuccessful applicants would make further applications with access to up-to-date vacancy lists to help them make informed decisions. They can continue to make applications until no suitable vacancies remain or HEI terms are underway.

30.27. By making an application in Apply 3, applicants would be viewed as confirming their intention to take up the place if offered.

Enrolment

30.28. As currently, most vacancies would be filled by the end of August, although applications could be received until the end of September if there are remaining vacancies. No change is envisaged or required for the start of the academic term.

[41] BIS Department for Business, Innovation and Skills: Higher Education, Students at the Heart of the System, June 2011, Chapter 4 – A diverse and Responsive Sector, 4.19 - http://c561635.r35.cf2.rackcdn.com/11-944-WP-students-at-heart.pdf

31. Benefits and risks of the proposed 2014 year of entry enhancements

31.1. These changes represent significant enhancements to the current process without introducing fundamental reform at a time when the HE sector is itself managing demanding changes resulting from the HE White Paper in England, other policy changes elsewhere and new tuition fee regimes across the UK.

31.2. By renaming Extra and Clearing as Apply 2 and Apply 3, we aim to normalise these phases of the application cycle and remove the stigma attached to them. In particular, Apply 3 becomes a managed and fairer process and it anticipates the recruitment of more applicants at this stage following the proposals for unlimited recruitment of applicants with grades of AAB or higher at A level and equivalent in England. We anticipate that some courses might deliberately reserve places for applicants in Apply 3 and advertise this fact, making the availability of places through Apply 3 more transparent earlier in the cycle and removing the annual speculation about the lack of Clearing places.

Table 5: Benefits and risks of the proposed 2014 year of entry enhancements to the present system

Proposed change	Benefits	Risks and issues
Re-name the current 'Apply', 'Extra' and 'Clearing' as 'Apply 1', 'Apply 2', and 'Apply 3' respectively.	Clear terminology which applicants will understand; reduced stigma attached to current Clearing phase.	Stigma continues despite changed terminology.
Improved terminology to replace CF, UF, CI etc.	More easily understood by applicants and HEIs.	Effort would be required to learn the new terminology.
Shift the January 15 deadline to the third Friday in January.	Longer period for research by applicant.	Shorter period for decision-making by HEIs.
Adhere to rigid deadlines and timetables.	Increased certainty for applicants and HEIs	Lack of flexibility to respond to particular circumstances.
Adopt 'intelligent' applications which reduce missing or incomplete information with functionality for uploading relevant supporting documentation.	Increased efficiency for HEIs and improved applicant experience.	
A single application portal and integrated application process for admissions and student finance.	Applicants benefit from a more streamlined and integrated application process.	
Allow customised personal statements.	Applicants would like ability to do this, particularly if applying for different subjects.	Added workload for applicants schools & colleges and HEIs.

Proposed change	Benefits	Risks and issues
Improve format and guidance for references.	Reference can be used as a meaningful part of the selection process.	HEIs may not take reference into account.
Open Apply 2 to those who haven't been through Apply 1.	More flexible process.	
Confirmation decisions are made on all offers for which results have been received before Apply 3 opens.	Clarity for applicants before Apply 3 opens as to whether they have been successful in Apply 2. HEIs have greater certainty about their numbers, in particular the take-up of insurance choices, so can produce accurate vacancy lists.	Less flexibility for HEIs. No improvement for applicants with later results such as GCSEs and Access diplomas.
Gap between Confirmation and Apply 3.	Longer period for research and reflection by applicant and a less intensive period of activity for HEIs.	Period of uncertainty after results received may be frustrating for unplaced applicants.
Gathered field for applications received in Apply 3.	HEIs would have sight of a pool of applicants before making decisions. A less rushed process for both applicant and HEI, removing the first-come-first-served nature of the current process and the reliance on phone contact.	Applicants who are not placed after one application may be disadvantaged in arranging accommodation, finance etc (although no more than under current Clearing system).
Apply 3 process based on an online application rather than a telephone conversation.	Avoids additional costs to HEIs of having to resource temporary call centres or additional staffing to deal with the peak in workflow that currently occurs during Clearing. The decision outcome is not linked to an applicant's ability to make telephone contact with an HEI.	No certainty for applicants about the likely outcome of their application so they may continue to phone HEIs in advance. Applicants without easy access to on-line facilities may be disadvantaged.
Increased flexibility for international applicants by removing inappropriate 'reject and decline by default' deadlines.	Facilitates recruitment of international applicants.	
Facility for automatic matching of results to offers.	Increased efficiency and reduced workload for HEIs at Confirmation.	Relies on consistency of format of offers and results which may not be straightforward to achieve and may not be error-proof.

31.3. Questions

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

31.3.1.A single offer date for all applications would help minimise the real or perceived advantages of applying as early as possible in the cycle.
31.3.2.The current process can be improved with a more disciplined approach to deadlines, service level agreements for decision-making by HEIs, with no informal agreements to relax them.
31.3.3.The replacement of Clearing with a managed process of applications with equal consideration for places available at that point would give students a more positive experience and achieve a better match of applicants to courses.
31.3.4.A short break between Confirmation and Apply 3 would help to improve the process to place applicants after they have received their results.

32. The insurance choice

32.1. The changes proposed for 2014 year of entry retain the use of an insurance choice on the basis that if the sector moves to a post-results system two years later, it is an unnecessary change. However, the review indicated that there were particular issues with this part of the process and we would welcome views on whether these could be addressed as part of the changes proposed for 2014 year of entry.

32.2. Offers which applicants accept for insurance are contractually binding on HEIs. This means that universities and colleges rely on historical patterns to judge how many offers to make, how many insurance choices are likely to be taken up and, therefore, how many places they might make available in Clearing. The filter-through of insurance acceptances after results is known to be a difficult process for HEIs intent on recruiting the maximum number of students to meet their control number for funding.

32.3. Feedback from site visits puts concerns about managing numbers and the problems associated with the insurance choice at the top of the list for reform. One of the priorities was to consider ways in which a backstop could be provided for applicants, without the accompanying number-management problems. It should also be noted that for some highly selective HEIs, the retention of the insurance choice is considered essential so that applicants who fail to meet their conditions have a second option at another selective HEI, especially since such HEIs rarely have places available in Clearing.

32.4. The table below shows a number of options which have been analysed and which might improve the insurance choice system.

32.5. Questions

We would welcome views about ranking the options below in your preferred order.

Table 6: Insurance choice options

Option	Description	Benefits	Disadvantages
Keep insurance choice as is.	A contractually-binding 2nd choice, intended to offer a safety net to applicants not meeting the conditions of their firm choice.	Supports applicants in making aspirational choices.	Evidence shows that it is not well understood by applicants and is not used wisely.
Remove insurance choice.	Applicants accept one conditional offer and enter Clearing if they don't meet the conditions.	Facilitates HEIs in managing their numbers.	Does not support applicants in making aspirational choices; disadvantages recruiting HEIs for whom the insurance choice may represent an important pool of applicants.
Enforce correct use of insurance choice.	Application system ensures that applicant has included at least one choice with lower entry requirements.	Supports applicants in using the insurance choice as it was intended; fewer applicants needing to enter Clearing.	Simple business rules don't reflect complexity of offers and what appears to be an unwise insurance choice may in reality not be, for instance for courses like medicine where the option for entry with lower grades does not exist.
Make insurance choice optional for HEIs.	HEIs choose whether applicants can accept them as an insurance choice or only as a firm choice.	HEIs for whom insurance choice is beneficial can continue with it; applicants can choose to apply to HEIs that accept insurance choice.	More complex than current process and has capacity for unfairness.
Replace insurance choice with priority wait list option.	Applicant chooses one firm choice and can be added to wait list for up to four others. HEI gives priority to waitlisted applicants once CFs have been confirmed.	Provides some back-up for applicant but not contractually binding on HEI so facilitates number management.	Provides less certainty for applicants than current process. Is complex and would be difficult to implement.

Section III

33. Timetable for reform

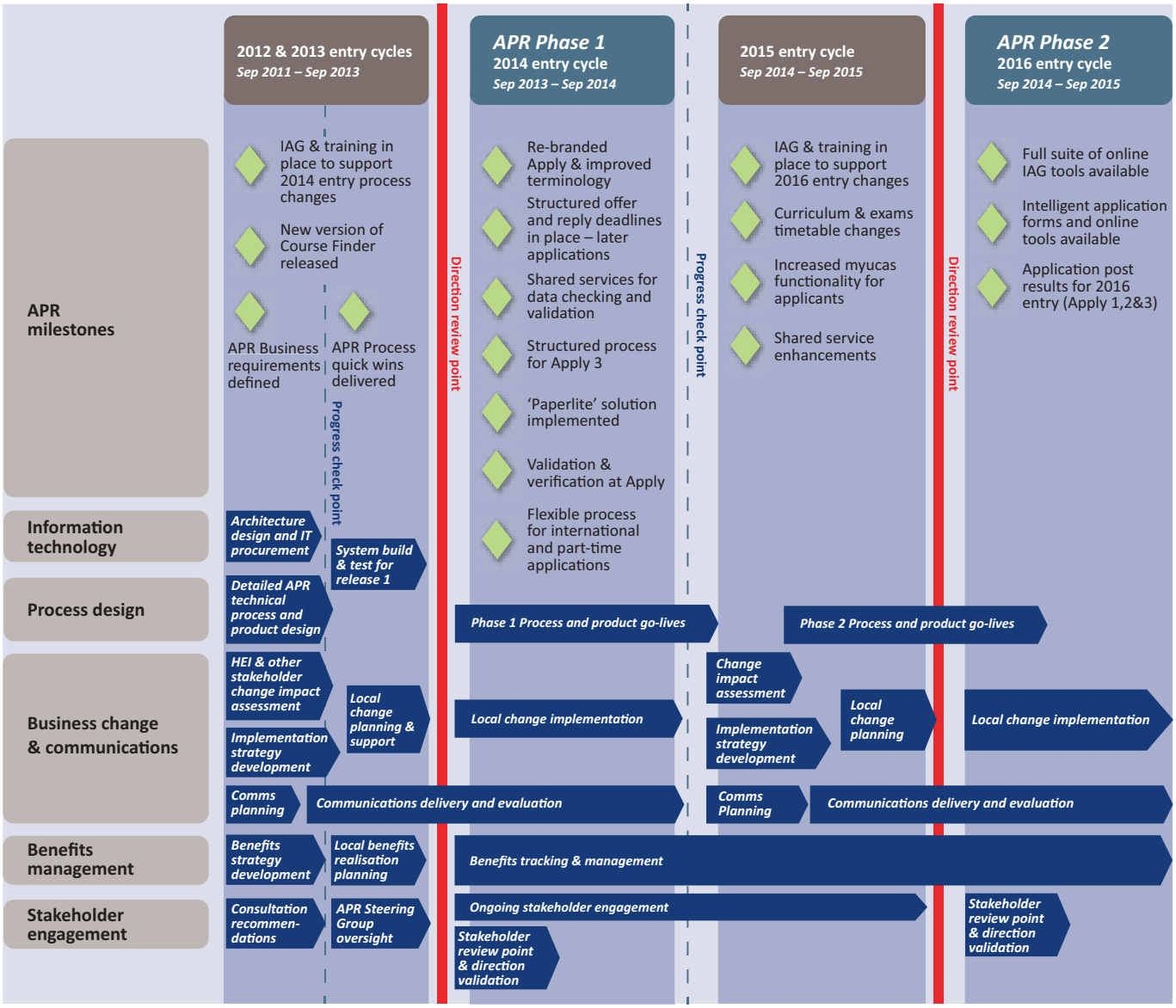
33.1. If an application post-results system is wanted by the education and higher education sectors the proposal would be to work towards the introduction of a full process of application post-results for 2016 year of entry. A set of changes would be introduced to the present system for 2014 year of entry to improve the process as quickly as possible and to make improvements that would facilitate a full implementation of application post-results for 2016 year of entry.

33.2. Questions

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements

33.2.1.2016 year of entry is a manageable start date for a system of applications post-results.
33.2.2.2014 year of entry is a manageable date to be ready for the proposed changes to the current system.
33.2.3.We belive that the proposed changes for 2016 year of entry and 2014 year of entry are workable solutions.
33.2.4.If the proposal for 2016 year of entry does not go ahead, further refinements are needed to the 2014 process.

Diagram 6: Implementation plan



Section IV

34. Consultation process

34.1. This is a strategic consultation to consider the evidence in support of admissions reform and to test the appetite of the key stakeholders for a reformed system based upon application post-results. No policy decisions have yet been taken and the aim of this consultation is to present evidence to key stakeholders to help enable them to shape future policy.

34.2. The consultation is open to all interested parties and we encourage responses from all parts of the sector, including higher education, schools and colleges, representatives of applicants to higher education and other stakeholders such as awarding bodies, representative organisations, government departments and their agencies.

34.3. This level of consultation may be of most interest to strategic leaders. If these proposals are accepted it is expected that a technical consultation targeted at operational professionals will follow.

34.4. A full Equality Impact Assessment (EQUIA) will be carried out when all responses to the consultation have been received.

34.5. The questions in the consultation have been designed to be as accessible as possible and to keep the administrative burden low for those responding. Open ended questions have been kept to a minimum but there is an opportunity to respond at length to any issue raised in each section, including those not specifically addressed in the questions. We welcome narrative responses to any aspect of the consultation.

34.6. Responses can be made online or in hard copy; we would encourage online responses where possible.

34.7. Prior to the formal consultation UCAS actively engaged in an informal dialogue with key stakeholders to obtain initial evidence and gain an understanding of the issues that needed to be raised in the consultation.

34.8. During the period of the formal consultation, UCAS will be holding regional focus groups with representatives of applicants, teachers and HEIs and other stakeholders to elicit more detailed feedback. Details will be made available on the UCAS website.

34.9. All responses to the consultation will be analysed carefully by UCAS officials and experts in specific areas who will submit a report to the UCAS Board.

34.10. A consolidated report will be published on the UCAS website in March 2012. Hard copies will be made available on request.

34.11. Following publication of the report, the UCAS Board will consider the responses and decide the extent to which the sector has indicated its support for implementation of:

- the interim solution proposed for 2014, which does not represent a fundamental reform of the current admissions system but would introduce enhancements to it
- a move to a system of applying for higher education following receipt of results proposed for 2016 or later.

34.12. UCAS is a service provider to its members which are providers of higher education. The UCAS Board will therefore seek advice from HEI representative bodies in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland before any recommendations are adopted.

34.13. If the sector indicates its support for a change to a post results model, a recommendation will be made to the Secretary of State for Education, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and their equivalents in the devolved administrations and stakeholders will be kept updated as appropriate.

Section V

35. Glossary

Adjustment
Applicants whose results exceed the conditions of their firm choice can look for an alternative place whilst retaining their original confirmed place.

Apply
The UCAS online application system for applying for higher education courses.

Choice
An application to a particular course at an HEI. An applicant may make up to five choices on their initial application.

Clearing
Process by which applicants who are not holding any offers after receiving their results can apply for course vacancies.

Conditional offer
An offer made by a university or college, whereby the applicant must fulfil certain criteria before being accepted on a course.

Confirmation
Process by which conditional offers become unconditional or are unsuccessful depending on the qualification or exam results achieved.

Decline
The offer is turned down by the applicant.

Direct applications
An applicant is placed directly by the HEI and a record of prior acceptance is registered by UCAS.

Entry Profiles
Comprehensive information available to applicants about individual courses and HEIs, including statistics and entry requirements.

Equal consideration
Applicants who apply by the specified deadline are considered as a 'gathered field' alongside all other applications received by that date.

Firm choice
The offer chosen by the applicant as their first choice.

Gathered field
Decisions on applications are deferred until the specified closing date.

HEI
Higher education institution.

Insurance choice
The offer chosen by the applicant as their back-up or second choice.

International
Applicants living permanently in countries outside the EU.

Main scheme
The primary application route whereby applicants make up to five choices and may accept a firm and insurance choice from the offers they receive from HEIs.

Reject
When an application is turned down by an HEI.

Track
A system for applicants to track the progress of their application online and reply to any offers received.

Unconditional offer
An offer made by an HEI when it is satisfied that the applicant has met all the entrance requirements.

Unplaced
An applicant who has not been successful in achieving a confirmed place at an HEI.

Section VI

36. Access to data

36.1. This document and the proposals in it are based on the comprehensive and fundamental Admission Process Review initiated by the UCAS Board in its corporate strategy of September 2010. The process was thorough and meticulous, setting out to provide both qualitative and quantitative data to assess the current admissions process and understand the scope for improvement. Key findings and conclusions were rigorously tested against the wealth of data accumulated by UCAS over the years to ensure that they could be supported by all the available evidence. We also tested our findings against data held by other stakeholders and we are extremely grateful to them for their willingness to share their data with us.

36.2. The evidence base for our conclusions is strong and much of it is used in the document to support our findings and proposals. However, it would be impossible to include all the available evidence and retain an accessible document. We do understand that many of you responding to the consultation and affected by the proposals may wish to access the data at a much more detailed level than can be available here.

36.3. All of the detailed data on which this consultation is based will be available at **www.ucas.com/admissionsprocessreview**. We trust you will find it helpful.

Section VII

37. How to respond

37.1. All consultation questions are embedded in the main body of the text in the section to which they refer. We hope you will find this helpful as you consider your responses.

37.2. You may respond to the consultation online at **www.ucas.com/admissionsprocessreview** where you will find full instructions on how to respond.

Responses should be received no later than 20 January 2012.

Notes

Notes

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

www.ucas.com/admissionsprocessreview
or email: admissionsprocessreview@ucas.ac.uk

You can also contact the team or return your response (no later than 20 January 2012) to:

APR Team
UCAS
Rosehill
New Barn Lane
Cheltenham
GL52 3LZ

V2.0 03.11.11

UCAS