

## UCAS sets out ways to enhance how students make their university choices

For immediate release, Wednesday 21 April 2021

UCAS has today published a potential new model for university admissions that would see students receive their offers based on their actual achievement, rather than an estimate, and eliminate pre-qualification unconditional offers, which have been seen to impact on student attainment<sup>1</sup>.

Today's report '*Reimagining UK admissions*' proposes a 'post-qualification offer' approach – students would complete their UCAS application as they do now, but universities would only make them offers once they have received their examination results. Students would also have the chance to explore new opportunities with their results in hand. However, UCAS warns the proposal needs to be considered alongside three key challenges that must be overcome in order to deliver them: how it aligns with the application process for international students; how we ensure that students receive support from schools and colleges during the post-results offer-making period; and how we maintain the benefits of a cross-UK model for admissions.

The proposals follow over two years of extensive engagement by UCAS, and includes the input of nearly 15,000 applicants. 70% of student surveyed are in favour of a system that still allows for applications to be made before exams.

The report from UCAS comes a few weeks before the closure of a Department for Education consultation on the introduction of post-qualification admissions, which is asking for views on two different models for university admissions.

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<sup>1</sup> Applicants who accept unconditional offers are 11.5 percentage points more likely to miss their predicted grades by three or more grades:

<https://www.ucas.com/file/292731/download?token=mvFM1ghk>

UCAS has today backed a variation of one of the models proposed, but strongly warned against any change that would see students making both applications and receiving offers after their exams in a pressured timeframe, as this could lead to poorer quality decisions by students, and increase dropout rates. Today's report includes new UCAS research that shows students who apply late in the cycle, who have a shorter relationship with their chosen university, are more likely to drop out than those who apply by January.

**Clare Marchant, Chief Executive of UCAS, said:**

“We have spoken to thousands of UCAS' customers, and heard the message that there could be a different way to do university admissions that will tackle some of the well documented challenges with the current system, namely unconditional offers and the use of the predicted grades.

“UCAS has serious concerns about any model that would see all application and offer making activity happen after exams, and think this would lead to an increase in dropout rates, particularly in disadvantaged groups – the exact opposite of what we are trying to achieve through reform. It also runs the risk of making university offers purely about exam results, and not individuals, and isn't inclusive of the full range of assessment techniques used, such as portfolios, auditions and interviews.

“Instead, UCAS proposes a model where students make their applications before their exams, and universities make offers when results are known, eliminating the need for predicted grades. This, we feel, gives students the benefit of researching their options over an extended period, and making a decision at the point they are most informed.

“However, such an approach is not without significant challenge. Any new model would require schools and colleges to be available for longer during the summer to support students as they receive offers. The vast majority of students rely on this

support, with 85% saying in our survey that they consulted with a teacher or adviser when making their university decisions, and two-thirds doing this on a regular basis.

“Equally, consideration would need to be given on how international students apply to UK universities, as a system where offers are made later in the year poses significant risks to the UK’s competitive position in the global student recruitment market.

“Through our engagement stakeholders also told us the importance of maintaining and enhancing the options available to students. This includes ensuring that all UK destinations remain available, but also that greater information is given about other routes, such as apprenticeships, alongside undergraduate options.”

## **Ends**

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## **Notes for editors**

**A full copy of the report is available to media on request.**

UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, is an independent charity, and the UK's shared admissions service for higher education.

Our services support young people making post-18 choices, as well as mature learners, by providing information, advice, and guidance to inspire and facilitate educational progression to university, college or an apprenticeship. We manage almost three million applications, from around 700,000 people each year, for full-time undergraduate courses at over 380 universities and colleges across the UK.

We also provide a wide range of research, consultancy and advisory services to schools, colleges, careers services, professional bodies and employers, including apprenticeships.

We're a successful and fast-growing organisation, which helps hundreds of thousands of people every year. We're committed to delivering a first-class service to all of our customers — they're at the heart of everything we do.