

ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE RESPONSE AND DECISION:

ALLOCATING UCAS TARIFF POINTS TO APPRENTICESHIPS AT LEVEL 3 (IN ENGLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND) AND SCQF LEVEL 6 (MODERN APPRENTICESHIPS IN SCOTLAND)



INTRODUCTION

Every year, UCAS supports nearly 1.2 million people in exploring their post-secondary choices. As part of this, around 750,000 applicants apply to over 350 universities and colleges across the UK.

Each cycle, students from across the globe present thousands of different qualifications as part of their application. Whilst many universities and colleges will list specific qualifications as part of their entry requirements, some will articulate these using the UCAS Tariff – a broad metric based on a qualifications size and grading structure.

Since the introduction of the revised Tariff in 2017, UCAS has expanded the range of provision that attracts Tariff points. In 2022, points were allocated to all regulated Level 3 and SCQF Level 6 qualifications.

In recent years, UCAS has received consistent feedback from stakeholders calling for the allocation of UCAS Tariff points to apprenticeships.

To support all students in understanding the educational pathways available to them, UCAS has conducted extensive stakeholder engagement since Spring 2023 to understand how Tariff points could be allocated to Level 3 and SCQF Level 6 Apprenticeships. The proposed model was developed with robust input from a wide range of stakeholders. Input was also received on the proposed model through a public feedback exercise, which was held between the 20th of May and 20th of June 2024. Over 200 stakeholders from across the sector submit feedback on UCAS' proposed model to include apprenticeships in the UCAS Tariff. This report summarises the findings from the engagement exercise.

From the 2026 cycle, UCAS Tariff points will be allocated to Level 3 and SCQF Level 6 apprenticeships. This will:

- ▶ Broaden the range of post-16 provision encapsulated within the UCAS Tariff.
- ▶ Support higher education providers to understand the size and scope of a learner's apprenticeship in the same context as other post-16 programmes of study at the same level.
- ▶ Help applicants that have achieved, or are working towards completing an apprenticeship understand options for their next steps should they wish to enter higher education, as well as the advisers that work with them.

The approach will be reviewed and a report published after data from one full cycle is available, running from autumn 2025 to autumn 2026. The review will assess the use of Tariff points for apprenticeships, the impact this has on admissions decisions and to take account of any external changes to the apprenticeship landscape across all four nations. Further reviews will be undertaken in subsequent cycles as more data on impact becomes available

"THIS WILL SUPPORT LEARNERS ENGAGING WITH APPRENTICESHIPS TO BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY A CLEAR PATHWAY ONTO HIGHER EDUCATION SHOULD THEY WISH TO PURSUE THIS"

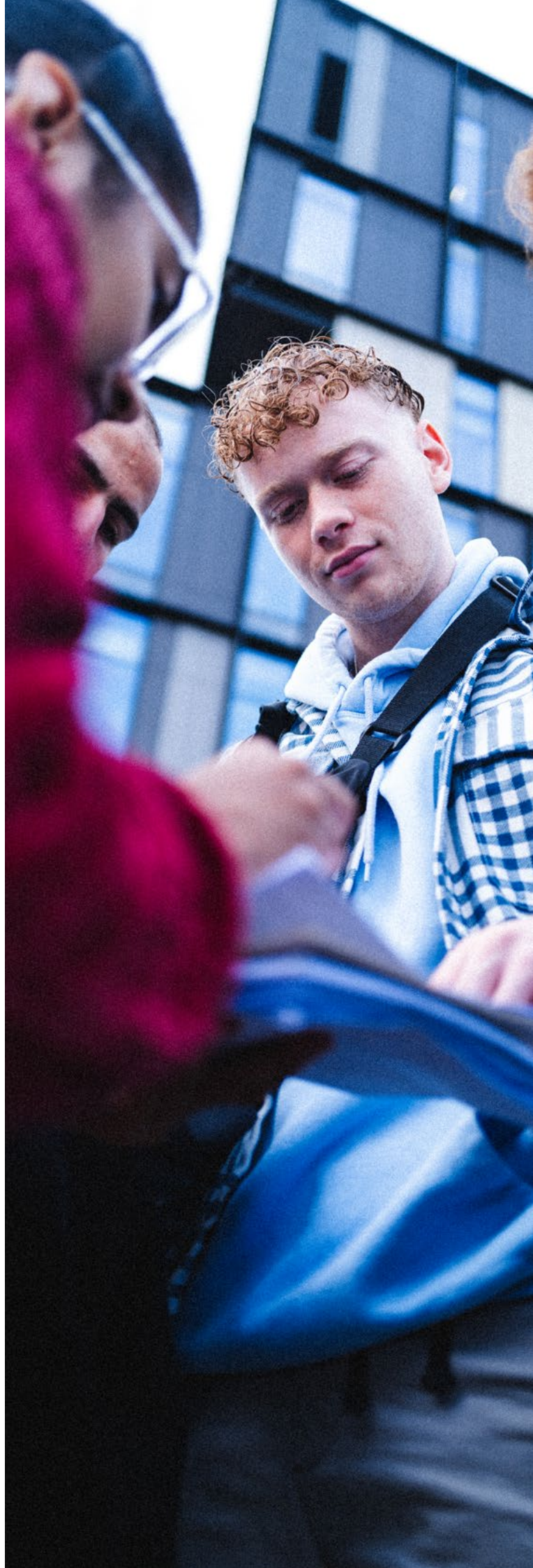


KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Over 200 organisations** responded to the feedback exercise. Respondents included universities, schools, colleges, employers, training providers, apprentices, students, awarding organisations, government bodies and regulators.
- ▶ **74% of respondents** said that they either strongly support or support UCAS' proposed model. 11% were neutral and 15% opposed the proposed model.
- ▶ **56% of respondents** agreed or strongly agreed that recommended duration is the best measure of the size of an apprenticeship. 22% were neutral and 23% of respondents disagreed. Many acknowledged that there is not an alternative viable option.
- ▶ **50% agreed** with UCAS' proposal to not allocate grade bands above a pass for a merit or distinction, with 15% neutral and 35% disagreeing.
- ▶ **67% of respondents** agreed that the proposed model meets the guiding principles set out by UCAS to develop the model. 16% were neutral and 17% disagreed.

NEXT STEPS

- ▶ UCAS Tariff points for Level 3 and SCQF Level 6 apprenticeships will support those students applying for 2026 entry. They will be included within the UCAS Tariff Tables from May 2025.
- ▶ UCAS will be co-designing information, advice and guidance with providers to ensure appropriate support is provided to applicants, advisers and universities and colleges.
- ▶ UCAS will review the use and impact of Tariff points being allocated to apprenticeships during the 2027 cycle, along with any broader feedback regarding this development. This review will also include reflecting on any policy and regulatory changes to apprenticeships across the four nations.



BACKGROUND

The UCAS Tariff is a broad metric that translates qualifications and grades into a numerical value and is used by some universities and colleges to articulate their entry requirements. In 2017, a revised version of the Tariff was introduced based on a qualifications size and grading structure. In 2022, Tariff points were allocated to all regulated Level 3/ SCQF Level 6 qualifications. They are also allocated to Foundation Apprenticeships in Scotland.

Universities and colleges accept an array of qualifications each cycle. Whilst some courses will list specific qualifications and subjects, others may accept a wider range of qualifications. The Tariff is a tool used by some institutions to capture this breadth of provision. Not all universities and colleges use the UCAS Tariff. Equally, just because a qualification doesn't attract Tariff points does not mean it isn't suitable for entry to higher education.

To date, apprenticeships at Level 3/SCQF Level 6 (Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland) have not attracted Tariff points, although those standards and frameworks that contain regulated qualifications may do so. To better support students' understanding of progression routes into higher education, enhance guidance for admissions teams, teachers and advisers, and in response to demand from the apprenticeship sector, UCAS has sought views on the inclusion of apprenticeships on the UCAS Tariff.

Following 12 months of consultation with over 60 apprenticeship training providers, apprentices, employers, universities and colleges, and sector representative bodies, UCAS developed a model for allocating Tariff Points to apprenticeships to propose to the sector more widely.

Development of the model was driven by four guiding principles:

- ▶ A comparable measure of size for apprenticeship provision. This references the amount of time spent in study and work.
- ▶ A comparable measure of standard for Level 3 and SCQF Level 6 apprenticeships.
- ▶ A method that manages the variance of differing apprenticeship structures across the UK, including grading so that no student is disadvantaged based on the nation in which they achieved their apprenticeship.
- ▶ Alignment with conventional Tariff methodology. Adhering to the methodology when allocating points to apprenticeships ensures the integrity of all comparisons within the Tariff, thereby aiding fairer admissions decisions.

The model uses the recommended duration of an apprenticeship, as set out by government and sector bodies in standards and frameworks, and SCQF credits in Scotland, to give each apprenticeship programme a size band of between 6 and 14. Each apprenticeship is assigned a grade band of 8 for a 'pass' outcome. In line with the standard UCAS Tariff methodology that is applied to the C grade at A Levels and other 'pass only' Level 3 programmes of study. The two figures are then multiplied together to produce the number of Tariff points allocated. The model is shown in the table below and the <link to> engagement document sets out the proposal in more detail.

Expected duration	SCQF Credits	Size band	Grade	Grade band	Tariff points England	Tariff points Wales	Tariff points Northern Ireland	Tariff points Scotland
36 months +	150+	14	Pass	8	112	112	-	112
24 – 35 months	100 - 149	12	Pass	8	96	96	96	
18 – 23 months	72 – 99	8	Pass	8	64	64	-	64
12 – 17 months	<72	6	Pass	8	48	48	-	48



WHAT WAS ASKED?

Stakeholders were invited to respond to the following questions:

- ▶ To what extent do you support the proposed model?
- ▶ Guidance proposed by regulators indicates that recommended duration (or credit for Scottish apprenticeships) is the best measure of size. To what extent do you support that this is the best measure of size for this purpose?
- ▶ We have not allocated grade bands above pass to ensure fairness across all nations of the UK, as apprentices in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland do not have an opportunity to achieve a merit or distinction grade as English apprentices do. Do you agree with this approach?
- ▶ To what extent do you agree that the proposed model meets our guiding principles?
- ▶ Is there anything that we have not considered in this paper that you would like to share thoughts on?

Respondents were able to contribute free text commentary with their responses to the questions asked in the engagement exercise. This enables a deeper understanding of the headline figures. An option to submit an extended response in addition was also made available.



SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSED MODEL

Overall, supportive respondents – representing 74% of the total respondents - said the model was well-considered, fair and promoted parity in the higher application process. Respondents said it would:

- ▶ Further recognise the value of apprenticeships in progression to higher education.
- ▶ Make pathways into higher education clearer for apprentices.
- ▶ Support schools and colleges in presenting the pathways available to apprentices.
- ▶ Signal to students that undergraduate study is an available pathway after an apprenticeship.
- ▶ Make it easier for universities and colleges to display entry requirements for apprentices.

The level of support varies a little by respondent type. Colleges, schools and advisers and universities were amongst the most supportive groups, all with support levels greater than 75%.

Of the 25% of respondents that said they did not support the model; concerns were raised about whether the use of recommended duration was the best measure of the size of an apprenticeship and whether some apprentices might be disadvantaged by the model in some circumstances. Some also questioned the number of Tariff points allocated by the model, saying that 96 points for a two-year apprenticeship at Level 3 was not high enough.

"THE NEED FOR PARITY BETWEEN APPRENTICESHIPS AGAINST BTECS, T LEVELS AND A LEVELS HAS BEEN NEEDED FOR SOMETIME TO SHOW THAT APPRENTICESHIPS ARE JUST AS VALUABLE AS OTHER ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS. THE PROPOSED APPROACH HAS CONSIDERED HOW TO ENSURE FAIR WEIGHT BETWEEN THE DEVOLVED NATIONS WHEN SIZING THE LENGTH AND GRADING STRUCTURES AVAILABLE."

RECOMMENDED DURATION AS THE BEST MEASURE OF SIZE

56% of respondents agreed that the recommended duration - as proposed by regulators and governments - is the best measure of size, with 22% neutral on the question. Further comments provided said it is correct that it is the expected duration set out in standards and frameworks rather than actual duration, which can vary based on a number of factors.

For the 23% that disagreed, reasons included that the use of duration does not account for differences between sectors and existing progression routes from apprenticeships to higher education. Others noted that Duration does not measure competency, and duration is determined differently across the four nations of the UK and so is not a consistent measure.

Respondents were asked to propose alternatives to duration as a measure of size. Many noted that it is difficult to envisage another approach that would be fair and acknowledged that there are no viable alternatives.

There were some suggestions of applying a system of credit instead. Upon investigation by UCAS use of a notional credit system would likely lead to broadly similar levels of Tariff points. Furthermore, it is UCAS' view that the proposed Tariff approach does not preclude the incorporation of a system of credit in future. Should a regulated system of credit be built for apprenticeships, then UCAS would review how this could form part of any future model for allocating Tariff points.





GRADE BANDS ABOVE A PASS

Respondents were asked if they agreed with the exclusion of grade bands for grades above pass (e.g. merit, distinction) in the model. This question produced the most divided response, with 50% of respondents in agreement, 35% opposed and 15% neutral. Of those that agreed, it was acknowledged that this was the fairest method of the model to ensure parity and consistency across the four nations. Furthermore, it was noted that the inconsistencies in potential outcomes for Level 3 Apprenticeships through End Point Assessment in England could create similar unfairness for some English apprentices.

Respondents that disagreed – representing 35% - said that it was unfair not to recognise apprentices that had worked hard to achieve a grade above a pass in England and may demotivate some students in seeking attain above pass where it is possible.

As this model is implemented, apprentices in England will be encouraged to advise HE providers of the grade they achieved in their apprenticeship as part of the admissions process. UCAS will work with providers to determine the exact process and guidance for this.

Should grading of apprenticeships be adopted more widely across the UK, UCAS will explore how to reflect this in any future iteration of the model.

NEXT STEPS

TIMING

UCAS Tariff points for Level 3 and SCQF Level 6 apprenticeships will support those applying for courses starting in 2026 entry. They will be added to the UCAS Tariff Tables from May 2025.

HOW UCAS WILL SUPPORT

Respondents said successful delivery of the proposed model would require comprehensive guidance for applicants, advisers and HE provider. UCAS will be co-designing the information, advice and guidance with the broader sector. This will be embedded on the relevant UCAS.com pages for each audience, included in training and guides, and communicated directly using a range of UCAS channels.

REVIEW

A review will be undertaken and a report published after data from one full cycle is available, running from autumn 2025 to autumn 2026. This will enable universities, schools, colleges and students, along with sector bodies, to provide feedback on the implementation and what further enhancements could be undertaken. It will also recognise and reflect any policy and regulatory developments across the four nations. Further reviews will be undertaken in subsequent cycles as more data on impact becomes available.



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