



Q&A on changes to university admissions in the UK

What is Universities UK's Fair Admissions Review?

Launched in June 2019, Universities UK's Fair Admissions Review aims to build greater levels of transparency, trust, and public understanding in admissions practices. The review – carried out by school, college, university and UCAS leaders – has involved extensive polling and consultation with students, schools, colleges, recent graduates, and education sector groups.

What is it recommending?

The review is making several recommendations including the ending of 'conditional unconditional' offers, guidance on the acceptable use of unconditional offers and a new code of practice to maintain standards; greater transparency, consistency, and standard indicators to support contextual offer-making; and a proposed switch to post-qualifications admissions (PQA) – where applicants express interest in universities, and offers are made to applicants after they have achieved their qualifications – from 2023 subject to full consultation.

Why is it necessary to review university admissions?

Universities are taking the lead on this issue, recognising the need to look at the current admissions system, and asking how it can be made fairer, more transparent and operate in the best interests of students.

How involved are students in these recommendations?

There has been extensive engagement with students. There have been three calls for evidence which received 180 responses from higher education and school staff, plus applicants, students and graduates and we commissioned polling with almost 1,500 applicants, whose views have informed the recommendations.

Are these recommendations applicable UK-wide?

All UK universities and colleges should adopt the principles. The recommendations are also UK-wide, with the exception of changes to contextual admissions where several of the proposals are already in place for the Scottish sector. Also, in Scotland, many students have already attained SQA Highers and met the academic requirements to enter higher education before applying, so the context of unconditional offers is slightly different.

What are the next steps on these recommendations?

Universities UK will progress the implementation of the short-term changes. There will be further consultation with stakeholders and students on some of the key recommendations like a move to a post-qualifications admissions (PQA) system.

Why does the Fair Admissions Review support PQA (specifically: a Post-Qualifications Offers model)?

The Fair Admissions Review has recommended that a move to PQA will result in greater transparency and confidence in the admissions system, giving students more choice for longer and will be less distracting for them in the lead up to exams. It would also reduce reliance on predicted grades and be fairer for students. This recommendation is, however, subject to full consultation with stakeholders and students; the earliest it would be implemented would be in three years' time (academic year 2023/24).

What will be the implications of the PQA proposal on university timetabling?

The option favoured by the Fair Admissions Review is that universities would offer places to students after they have received their exam results, on the same day. We believe university term dates would not need to change although this would be part of the consultation on this proposal.

How do Universities UK's plans to consult on PQA relate to the UK Government and UCAS' commitments to review admissions?

Universities UK (UUK) will consult with its members and others to work through the details of PQA. UCAS has played a leading role in the Fair

Admissions Review and shaping its recommendations, and UUK will continue to work closely with UCAS. UUK's consultation will complement and feed in to the UK Government's thinking on this issue.

Why can the change to a system of PQA not happen before 2023?

Making this kind of decision deserves careful consideration. There are many factors to weigh up, not the least its impact on school and university timetabling, and it would pose challenges for highly selective courses, and when arranging interviews or auditions. It may also mean there are fewer teachers available over the summer to help students make decisions, and less time for applicants to respond to offers. It will take time to get things right and we expect 2023 is the earliest that the system could be changed, given that students need to know what to expect well in advance of when they apply.

Why is this code of practice necessary?

The Fair Admissions Review has revised the principles underpinning university admissions. These are high level. The review recommends that university admissions professionals would benefit from more detailed guidance and specific examples of what they mean in practice. It is hoped the code of practice will provide this and we recognise it needs to have teeth – consequences for breaches of the code.

Who will own the code?

It is a Fair Admissions Review recommendation that UUK owns the code of practice (with each UUK member signing up to the code) and that UCAS' terms of service clearly state that institutions using UCAS must abide by the code. Although UUK does not represent all higher education providers, it is proposed that ownership could be shared with other representative bodies (such as Guild HE, Independent HE and the Association of Colleges).