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Qualification reform: 2019 and beyond – delivered by UCAS (Amy Smith, Senior Policy Executive)

This session looked in detail at some of UCAS qualification reform work, in the context of the 2018 and 2019 cycles. It considered key issues for HE providers in relation to big qualification changes (such as GCSE reform across the UK, and the introduction of T levels) and considers how students can be supported in navigating the changing landscape.

The changing landscape

This changing landscape also includes changes to fees i.e. funding could also bring changes to study e.g. levels of study, and who is offering them. Also effects of Brexit, i.e. how students are transferred to EU institutions.

1. Qualification reform in 2018

‘A’ levels - the decoupled AS and the 2 year linear exam.

Also the first substantive award of reformed vocational qualifications.

Key issues for HE:

Dual running applicants may declare incorrect version of the qualification

Different skills and aptitudes

Assessment changes

Fewer students are passing the qualifications

The changes to grade distribution

Greater need for differentiation at confirmation/clearing could lead to delayed decisions

2. Admission themes for 2018 cycle

533,000 students were placed in 2018.

Entry rate for UK 18 year olds rises but fewer acceptances.

Record numbers apply through Clearing.

EU demand still strong.

No progress in widening participation and Access since 2014.

3. Overview of current entry type of qualifications.

59.8% of applicants hold only ‘A’ levels1

10.1% hold only BTECs

7.2% have a combination of BTEC & ‘A’ levels

15.7% hold ‘other qualifications’- this is a 2.6% increase on 2017

‘Other qualifications?’

a) Cambridge technical –there are 5 different sizes. Also 2 suites, the 2012 and the 2016. The 2016 suite have been reformed in the same way as the BTEC Nationals.

b) Cambridge Pre- U Diploma

This is a level 3 qualification (academic) made up of 2 components: 3 principal subjects to include a global perspectives and independent research project (same as the EPQ)

3) Extended Project

Level 3 academic qualification with an independent project. It has increased in popularity.

There are also: The Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate ( Wales), International ‘A’ levels (don’t attract tariff points but are widely accepted by HE), AS levels, apprenticeships, other vocational qualifications e.g. City & Guilds and combinations of the above.

4. The change in how students use Clearing- who is applying direct to Clearing (DTC)?

2.5% of all UK acceptances used this route

Business and admin. were the most popular subjects

Nursing made up almost half of Group B DTC acceptances

4% of all acceptances to lower tariff providers were made DTC

70% aged 20 and over

91% domiciled acceptances

60% at providers 45 minutes away from home

Almost ¼ from London

Unconditional offer-making

Use of unconditional offers is becoming increasingly popular – a third of applicants received an offer with an unconditional component in 2018.

Trends have been towards a diversification of grade profiles- applicants predicted 11 A level points (BBC) proportionately receive the unconditional offers.

Students are more likely to miss their predicted grades than their peers with conditional offers.

Sentiment towards conditional unconditional offers is generally positive among applicants.

Who are BTEC students?

They are classified as Polar3 Q1 + Q2

POLAR3: Developed by HEFCE and classifies small areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of young participation in HE. Each of these groups represents around 20 per cent of young people and is ranked from quintile 1 (areas with the lowest young participation rates, considered as the most disadvantaged) to quintile 5 (highest young participation rates, considered most advantaged).

As well as BTEC reform there has also been reform to:

Geology with a practical element, which doesn’t count towards the ‘A’ level

GCSEs, which are now numbered 9-1

Functional skills and further vocational qualification reform

Continued apprenticeship standards with a move to adding tariff points to level 3 apprenticeships.

**Qualification reform in 2019: GCSEs**

* GCSEs in Northern Ireland
* Introduction of the C\* grade, aligned to grade 5 on the 9-1 scale.
* Grade B now aligns to grade 6.
* A\* aligns to grade 9.
* UCAS is engaging with the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment around messaging and support for higher education providers in setting entry requirements.

Key issues for providers

Fewer students are achieving B and grade A\* - impact on higher education providers’ entry requirements.

Welsh students continue to follow A\* - G but will not align with the Northern Irish scale

No direct equivalence with grade 8

**Beyond 2019: T levels and more**

T Levels are designed to support entry to skilled employment in technical occupations and progression to higher education options, including higher technical qualifications, higher apprenticeships, degree apprenticeships, and degrees.

T Levels are not qualifications in their own right, but composite technical study programs, delivered in a classroom setting, and incorporating five key components. This program includes:

**Technical qualification:**

* Core theory, concepts and skills for the industry area (Core)
* Specialist skills and knowledge for an occupation or career (Occupational Specialism)

**Industry Placement:**

* Between 315 and 420 hours
* With an employer

**Maths and English**

* Minimum standards in maths and English, if not already achieved prior to embarking on the T Level programme
* Could be level 2 (e.g.GCSE/functional skills) or Level 3 depending on the required standards

**Two year, Level 3, college-based provision**

High quality technical education provision.

Approved for delivery in 54 colleges across England.

Offered after GCSE, alongside ‘A’ levels and apprenticeships.

**Fifteen new routes, with pathways underneath**

**2020**

Digital production, design and development; design, surveying and planning education

**2021**

Health; healthcare science; science; onsite construction; building services engineering; digital and support services; digital business services

**TBC**

Accountancy; agriculture; animal care and management; catering; craft and design; human resources; legal and many more.

**How is a T level assessed/graded**

Technical qualification

* Core: external examination and employer-set project, graded A\*-E
* Occupational Specialism: synoptic assessment, graded pass, merit or distinction

Industry placement

* Employer reference

Maths and English

* Will vary depending on the qualifications taken (if applicable)

Overall

* If a student achieves all of the components, they will be given an overall T level grade of pass, merit or distinction

**How is UCAS supporting?**

* Consultation response (early 2018)
* Engaging with the Dept. for Education and Institute for Apprenticeships regarding T Level content.
* Facilitating engagement between HE admissions and the Department.
* Sharing T Level intelligence.
* UCAS tariff points and T Levels.
* Broadly in line with 3 ‘A’ levels, to reflect the size and complexity of the programme.

Key issues for admissions practitioners

* Binary choice or accept a mix?
* The importance of bridging provision between academic and vocational routes at Level 3.
* Suitability of T Levels for progression to HE.
* Difference in content in T levels – is the core transferable?
* Different grading structures.

Note taker: Maria Simmons, Recruitment Officer, CU Scarborough