

## **University of Cambridge International Examinations (Cambridge): Response to the UCAS Qualification Information Review**

### **Recommendation 1: Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs) (pgs 11-14 of consultation document)**

#### **Cambridge response**

In principle University of Cambridge International Examinations (Cambridge) is in favour of the QIPs as it makes sense to have all the information listed in a consistent format that is clear, brief and contains relevant information. This builds on our existing provision of qualification profiles to UCAS and has the capacity of offering useful additional information to those involved in Admissions.

At first sight the QIPs would seem to be more transparent. However, this will depend on the nature of the information included. Grade distributions, for example, can be interpreted in different ways. As it stands there is no indication of the size or nature of the cohort. It does not seem to be cumulative or to include U. There is the question of whether such distributions would be by subject or for the qualification as a whole. The current example appears to be Chemistry. The cohort for subjects varies – Mandarin Chinese or Classics are going to have a very different cohort to Chemistry or English. The Cambridge Pre-U cohort is not the same as the A Level cohort. Grade distributions alone are open to misinterpretation and providing the contextual information to add meaning would be extremely difficult and very long.

If international qualifications UCAS will need criteria to decide which should be included and will need to consider how the information would be sourced and benchmarked. Does UCAS have any authority to do this work? (Is this UK NARIC's role?). Cambridge International AS & A Levels have a separate structure from UK AS & A Levels so presumably would require a separate profile.

If Level 2 qualifications are included we can provide information on Cambridge IGCSE/Level 1/Level 2 Certificates and Cambridge O Levels. We would require guidance on whether the grade distributions be for all countries or UK only.

The timings seem ambitious especially if a transition period needs to be built in.

It would be useful for the communications to be ongoing with all stakeholders rather than being presented with the final product. Cambridge would like to see the draft QIPs for any qualification it is responsible for.

NB The information on the GLH of IB Highers (360) on page 12 appears to be incorrect as according to the UCAS website this is 240.

### **Recommendation 2: A move towards grade-based entry requirements (pg 15 of consultation document)**

#### **Cambridge response**

Cambridge agrees with the recommendation for the withdrawal of tariff points and promotion of grade based requirements and offers. There would be little impact on the Cambridge Pre-U cohort as this is already happening in many of the universities the cohort is applying to. This is more transparent providing it is clearly communicated to learners and advisers. The tariff probably needs to run for a few years after the introduction of QIPs but UCAS should cease evaluations 3-6 months before QIPs are introduced. Cambridge would appreciate being involved in the transition for the Cambridge Pre-U and its other international qualifications such as Cambridge IGCSE and Cambridge International AS/A Level.

**Recommendation 3: A means of comparing 'demand' across qualifications  
(pgs 16-20 of consultation document)**

**Cambridge response**

Cambridge agrees that universities are interested in a means of assessing the demand or rigour of a qualification. However, we are concerned with the proposed methodology and feel that numerical ratings are most likely to be open to misuse (as with the current tariff) and reducing qualifications to a numerical rating will lead to more mechanistic admissions processes.

A key concern relates to the methodological complexities involved in conducting demand analyses within a robust framework that is fit for purpose. The CRAS framework is suggested as a possible starting point for the development of a demands analyses method. Johnson and Mehta (2011) evaluated the CRAS Framework and reviewed the conceptual issues surrounding comparison of demand. They concluded that

*The original intentions of the CRAS framework were to give insight into dimensions that contribute to item demand... The framework is less clear about how these individual item characteristics interact when considered at question paper level. (p.32)*

*Any attempt to use an amended CRAS framework would need to address the challenges of the comparability of demand across whole qualifications.*

*Reference*

*Johnson, M. & Mehta, S. (2011) Research Matters: A Cambridge Assessment Publication, 12, 27 - 33*

**Recommendation 4: A simple qualifications metric for HE management information purposes  
(pgs 21-23 of consultation document)**

**Cambridge response**

Cambridge believes that it would be very difficult, and possibly unwise, to develop such a metric. Although the suggested use of 'management information points' is different to using tariff points in offer-making, the tariff already in existence could provide this function. Such a metric will be open to the same abuse as the current tariff. We believe that QIPs with descriptive information on the rigour and demand – or perhaps a broad categorisation – would be less open to abuse. Additional information on vocational aspects may also be useful.

The use of GLH has caused numerous difficulties in the past as there have been different definitions which has caused confusion. We would need clearly specified definitions of GLH.

**Recommendation 5: An annual report on the use of qualifications in HE admissions  
(pg 24 of consultation document)**

**Cambridge response**

Cambridge agrees with the production of an annual report and thinks it would be useful for the organisation.

**Recommendation 6: Optional admissions tools  
(pgs 24-25 of consultation document)**

**Cambridge response**

See comments on recommendations 3 & 4. An online calculator means reducing qualifications (and presumably grades) to numbers with all the associated problems. For example, is a C worth double an E and an A worth double a C and four times an E?

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