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## **DELIVERY PARTNERSHIP CONSULTATION 3: MODELS TO IMPLEMENT AN ADJUSTMENT PERIOD**

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### **Introduction**

This Consultation is being conducted for the Delivery Partnership by Professor Steve Smith, Chair of the Delivery Partnership's Working Group on Timings and Adjustment.

### **Purpose**

The aim of the Timings and Adjustment Working Group is to devise models to enable students who achieve higher grades than those required by their conditional offers to make a new application in August.

Comments are invited on two possible models to achieve this.

**Model A** proposes a new process which introduces the opportunity of making a new application, whilst protecting their original firm offer.

**Model B** proposes an extension of the existing UCAS EXTRA process, to allow student to make a new application whilst protecting their original firm offer.

### **Format**

This document describes both models, followed by a **Response Form**. Attention is drawn to benefits and risks to all stakeholders, as well as likely changes in behaviour of each of those stakeholders as a result.

We are interested in all your comments and suggestions, and any additional views you may have on the likely consequences of introducing each model.

**The consultation runs from 29 May to 18 June 2007.**

### **How to respond**

Where possible please respond using the Response Form and return electronically. If you do not have an electronic version or any queries regarding the consultation please contact Fiona Waye at

Fiona.waye@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk

### **Please return to:**

Fiona Waye  
Universities UK (DP Models of Adjustment Consultation)  
Woburn House  
20 Tavistock Square  
London, WC1H 9HQ

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## Background

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The Government response in May 2006 to the consultation 'Improving the Higher Education applications process' included the following recommendations be considered by the HE sector led Delivery Partnership Steering Group (DPSG):

**14 Facility to make fresh applications**

***'Students who achieve higher grades than required by their conditional offers to be able to make a new application and have their original first firm conditional offer protected whilst they do so.'***

**15 New application round**

The original government response to these recommendations is as follows:

*'Recommend that the DP introduce this proposal and outline a number principles that the facility to make fresh applications should deliver. Reference is also drawn to how these principles might be realised via the introduction of a post-qualification adjustment period. It is suggested that this could take place immediately after exam results are published and before Clearing starts and could operate as follows:*

- this is a time-limited application round, which begins after results are published and completes before Clearing starts.*
- the round will be created in the time freed up by moving the publication of exam results forward (one week, at least, is envisaged).*
- students who had achieved the grades of their first firm conditional offer (CF) offer could confirm that they wanted to take up this offer. Any insurance offers that this group held would become vacancies*
- other students who had achieved higher grades than required by their CF offer could choose to protect that offer whilst they made one application for an alternative place (any insurance offers they held would become vacancies).*
- students who had missed the grades of their CF offer could indicate to the HEI that they still wished to be considered as a 'near miss' in the hope of being accepted, whilst protecting their insurance offer, or they could choose to accept their insurance offer.*
- HEIs would consider all new applications, alongside all the 'near misses'. They could fill any vacancies made available as a result of unneeded insurance offers (see third and fourth bullets above);*
- decisions and confirmations would be made by the end of this period.*
- clearing would start immediately after this.*

*Recommend that the DP consider how this adjustment period could work in practice. DP to evaluate student behaviour following the implementation of this proposal in order to assess the*

*volume of new applications made in the post-qualification adjustment round, the impact this has on HEIs and changes in the use of insurance choices.'*

The Wilson Group had made the original recommendations based on the perception that some students were, for a number of reasons, not applying to institutions with a high entry requirements, where perhaps they might otherwise have liked to apply. The proposal was also seen as a stepping stone towards achieving full Post-Qualification Admission by allowing students to apply for courses that more closely matched their achieved grades.

Anecdotal evidence, confirmed by a number of teaching and advisory staff, suggests that some students really do lack the confidence to apply to some institutions and tend to play safe with their applications, to ensure that they will receive offers of places, but it seems that this is a fairly small number of people. Whilst some students do achieve grades which are higher than their university conditional offers, the scale of the potential problem where students would really have liked to substitute their place for one elsewhere, is unknown. However, there is a real concern to try to help students in this situation, by changing the UCAS process or rules in some way, but the message that has been received so far from all stakeholders who have been informally consulted, is that any change needs to be proportionate to the perceived problem. Any change should minimise the introduction of increased complexity in the admissions process, and identify likely adverse changes in behaviour from institutions, applicants, schools and colleges.

The models proposed therefore try to answer the question: 'How can we amend the UCAS process to allow students who have done better than their CF offer, to seek a place elsewhere whilst still holding on to their original confirmed place?'

The Timings and Adjustment Working Group considered two draft models at their meeting on 1 May, for the delivery of the above recommendations: the 'Adjustment' model, and the 'Aspiration' model. These were discussed with practitioners at a number of opportunities including the Academic Registrar's Council Admissions Practitioners Group, and the Stakeholder Conference on 10 May.

Throughout the discussions with stakeholders, issues of fairness were raised:

- Fairness in singling out one group for 'special treatment'
- Fairness to those applicants who had 'just missed' their original offers, who in the current process would have their places confirmed, but who in the new process might lose out completely if they are made to wait a long time for their confirmation decisions to be made.
- Fairness in suggesting bringing back a sixth choice in the 'aspiration' model, having just reduced the number of choices to five, that would most likely be used by the most confident, or over confident students.
- Disadvantaging those who are involved in 'adjustment', in the process of accommodation allocation at HEIs.

During these discussions, and subsequent comments received from a number of stakeholders, it became clear that the second model being proposed, the introduction of an opportunity for students to

make an 'aspiration application' prior to receiving their results, did not fully answer the question posed in recommendations 14 and 15.

As a result of the discussions, a third model emerged, which proposed extending the UCAS EXTRA process.

The meeting of the working group on 25 May considered all three models, and in light of the feedback received made the decision to remove the second 'aspiration' model, and to consult on the remaining two.

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## **High-level consequences of both models**

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A number of high-level consequences of both models have been recognised, which need to be identified clearly and, it is suggested, borne in mind when responding to this consultation:

- It is by no means the case that every student who exceeds their conditional offer will wish to change institution. It is hoped that introducing a new process which allows a change, will not prompt students to make decisions that might not be in their best interest. It is important that applicants select the right courses for them which best suit their skills, aspirations and provide the greatest chances of success.
- That these models will be applicable throughout the full achievement range of students: it is not solely applicable for students achieving the highest grades. Therefore there could potentially be significant movement of students between HEIs throughout the sector, which may introduce a degree of instability.
- The introduction of such a process could place undue emphasis on the use of grades for university entry, and undermine the holistic nature of assessment within the UK admissions process, and hence have consequences for student retention.
- The possibility of raising expectations in students which may not be able to be met. The process will not be able to create more places in very competitive courses, and therefore there will inevitably be dissatisfaction amongst some students.
- There is a real concern that introducing either model will disadvantage a larger group of applicants ie those who have 'just missed' the terms of their offer, in favour of a smaller group of applicants who have exceeded the terms of their offer and wish to move.
- The possibility of instability for some institutions in terms of student numbers and manageability of their admissions process in August.
- The new process will not work successfully for the benefit of students if advisory and guidance services are not aware of the new service and how it works.

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## **The current process**

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At the publication of A-level results, most students are holding two conditional offers: Conditional Firm (CF) and Conditional Insurance (CI). Higher Education institutions receive the A-level and other results

four days before the publication of results day, and thus have time to process their admission decisions. The majority of all decisions (around 90%) are made before the student receives their results. Clearing begins the day that the A-level results are published. Where a student has their Conditional Firm place confirmed, their status becomes Unconditional Firm (UF). This means that the student is now committed to that institution, and the UCAS process comes to an end as the student is 'placed'.

The UCAS rules require that a student wishing to release themselves from this commitment, withdraw completely from the UCAS scheme and apply again the following year. However, if they wish to seek a place elsewhere, because of extenuating circumstances e.g. family bereavement, the student can ask their confirmed institution to release them from their commitment, and to be 'released into clearing'. This results in the student being put in the situation where they have to take a risk that they will find a place elsewhere in clearing. In reality however, students who wish to make a change tend to telephone those institutions to which they would like to move, to try to gain a commitment from them before asking to be released from their original institution.

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## **Identification of eligibility for the models**

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Only students who hold qualifications which have graded results would be suitable for this process. Students from the UK and EU i.e. home for fees purposes would be eligible for this process. Although not formally part of the scheme, institutions could consider overseas applicants, especially those who are presenting with UK qualifications, at their own discretion.

The wide variation in the way that institutions express offers, the inclusion of non-academic factors, and the variety of qualifications being offered all mitigate against a simple algorithm whereby either an institution or UCAS could identify those who had done better than their conditional firm offer.

There are concerns about placing the burden of identification on the applicant, or about asking HEIs to identify those who had exceeded their required achievement and therefore might be at risk of being lost to another institution.

However, as it is the applicant's choice about whether to seek a place elsewhere, then it does seem legitimate to place at least the initial identification of exceeding requirements back on the applicant, whichever of the models for delivery is chosen.

Although the process depends on conditional offers, the question has been raised about students in Scotland who often have a status of UF, having been accepted on achievement of their Highers in Fifth Year, but who may be taking additional qualifications in their Sixth Year. Some of these students may wish to make a move when they receive their sixth year results, possibly to an institution in another part of the country ie which makes conditional offers based on Sixth Year or Year 13 results. Consideration will need to be taken on whether these students would meet the eligibility criteria.

## **MODEL A: Introduction of an 'adjustment process' following publication of A-level results**

This model is closest to that suggested in the government response to the Wilson consultation, where an 'adjustment period' is introduced following results publication.

It is intended to allow those students who exceed the terms of their conditional firm offer to make an 'adjustment choice' when their results come out, whilst holding on to their conditional firm (CF) place. This in effect legitimises current practice which happens at the margins, where people do seek to move when they achieve higher grades than expected. In the current process, this risks their CF choice, as they have to ask to be 'released into clearing' in order to take up that place.

Model A introduces a new process, which, whilst adding a layer of complexity, would also be transparent in its operation, so that both institutions and applicant actions were visible throughout, through the introduction of new 'statuses' which would be reported through UCAS Track.

This would provide the opportunity for a 'mini-gathered-field' between those students who have just missed the terms of their offers and those students being considered in 'adjustment', but it may mean that decisions on those 'just missed' students would be delayed compared with now, until after results publication.

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### **Principles of Model A:**

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Model A retains many of the concepts of the current UCAS scheme, alongside some new ones:

1. At confirmation, an applicant cannot decline a place which they had accepted firmly, except in the case where they wish to accept an offer of an 'adjustment' place
2. An applicant who is rejected by their CF institution, becomes CF/UF at their Conditional Insurance choice, provided they had not already been rejected by the CI institution.
3. Acceptance at a CI institution following rejection from a CF institution ties the student to that institution.
4. Rejection at both CF and CI institutions is necessary to become eligible for clearing.
5. The process is only available to those who exceed their 'CF' offer, and will not be available for those rejected by their CF at confirmation, and who therefore become CF/UF at their insurance institution, even if they have exceeded the conditions of that institution's offer
6. The applicant can only use the adjustment process ONCE.
7. Where a course is full from their UF/CF students, the institution is under no obligation to consider adjustment requests for that programme.

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### **THE PROCESS:**

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An applicant moves through the UCAS process in the usual way, usually resulting in a CF and CI offer being held. Occasionally an applicant might hold a CF alone. The adjustment process would take place following the announcement of results, and simultaneous with clearing. (Discussions

were held around whether a period of time should be put aside for the 'adjustment' process, prior to clearing, but it was strongly felt that this would be unworkable for students who would find themselves eligible for clearing immediately, and those institutions who receive significant numbers of students through clearing). The process that institutions use for making changed course offers would not change – institutions could make a changed course offer even where a student was also seeking an 'adjustment' place.

a. At **confirmation** (ie when results are received) Institution actions would be:

1. Receive results
2. Apply new default UCAS status: 'under consideration in confirmation', to all records until a decision is made.
3. Consider CF applicants, and process acceptances, which can include those who have just missed the terms of their offer if the institution wishes
4. Put aside marginal cases, ie those who have just missed their offer
5. Consider definite rejects, and process rejects
6. Consider CI applicants and process acceptances for those who have met their conditional offer, and rejects for those who do not, putting aside any marginal cases
7. Results published to applicants
8. Consider adjustment applications against 'under considerations' and process as decisions made

b. The **adjustment process**:

1. The applicant receives results which they believe exceed those required as part of the conditional firm offer they are holding (CF)
2. The applicant contacts the institution that he wishes to 'adjust' to, and providing there is a positive response, applicant completes 'application for adjustment' naming ONE course, using the UCAS system
3. The applicant's record is forwarded to the appropriate institution (Adjustment institution).
4. The 'adjustment' institution decides whether to accept the student or not, updating the UCAS record to new status CAdj
5. The original CF institution receives the transaction, which flags the request for confirmation that this student has exceeded terms of their offer
6. The CF institution 'agrees' or 'disagrees'
7. The adjustment institution becomes UF (UAdj)
8. CF institution becomes decline.

OR

8. Student has opportunity to accept or decline adjustment and CF institution at this stage.

c. **System changes**

- The process may require the reintroduction of the differing CF and CI reject by default dates.

- A new student accept or decline phase at confirmation will need to be introduced
- Suggested default confirmation status of 'under consideration' to be implemented.
- Institutions might need to declare vacancies as part of 'adjustment' process.

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## **Implications for stakeholders**

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### **Higher Education Institutions**

#### **Benefits**

- Some institutions may gain student numbers where they have vacancies
- Provides a transparent process to operate, which identifies 'adjustment' applicants from clearing applicants.

#### **Risks**

- There is still a potential for confusion between 'adjustment' and 'clearing' contacts, especially over the telephone at such a busy time
- Some institutions or particular programmes may find that they lose more students to 'adjustment' than others, it has been suggested that this may be in the institutions with middle-range entry requirements and that there may be significant 'sideways' movement and churn, which will affect the ability of these institutions to plan their entry numbers
- The most popular institutions or courses may find that they are unable to consider adjustment applications, having already filled their places with CF students who met the terms of their conditional offers
- There could be the undermining of current processes around induction and accommodation, which could mean that 'adjustment' students miss out on housing due to late decisions on their applications (a current risk with clearing applicants)
- Correctly identifying 'have exceeded the terms of the offer', where a student is offering qualifications from other countries e.g. EU
- Dealing fairly with students whose results are published prior to the August confirmation period e.g. International Baccalaureate and BTEC
- Disputes between institutions and applicants on whether an applicant has done better or not
- In the case of there being a large number of requests for adjustment, there may be insufficient time for interviews or auditions leading to more students being recommended to take a gap year and to re-apply.

#### **Required or possible adverse behavioural change**

- Wording of conditional offers could become considerably more vague using words such as 'minimum' and expressing ranges of required grades

- Conditional offer grades will creep up to guard against losing students to the 'adjustment' process in August
- Large numbers of institutions may decide not to cooperate with the 'adjustment' process, thus not enabling the movement of students
- If the decision is made to bring forward the release of A-level results, because more time is needed to make confirmation decisions having introduced an additional process, then HEIs will need to begin their confirmation period earlier, which could include the Saturday as well as the current Sunday prior to results
- If interviews/auditions were required and were feasible at this point of the process, these would need to be held early in the week following publication of results (happens in many HEIs already for clearing applicants)
- HEIs are likely to expend time identifying 'at risk' applicants, i.e. those who have done better than conditional offer and might seek adjustment elsewhere
- Increased numbers of enquiries from applicants are likely, before confirmation about whether adjustment applications will be welcomed, and therefore staff will need to be available to deal with them
- HEIs would need to make very clear those courses where adjustment (and clearing) applications could not be considered because of the requirements for interviews, other tests such as aptitude tests or auditions, immunisations and so on
- The model assumes that all or most CF accepts will already have been processed to UF by the release of results date, but at the moment this is not always the case, and in reality may increase the number of applicants kept waiting for decisions beyond the results publication date
- For the sake of clarity, those courses which require aptitude tests, selection interviews or auditions, might choose to publicise that they are unable to consider adjustment applications
- There could be a resultant decrease in relationship building with applicants, particularly Widening Participation students, if the risk of losing students at confirmation is greater.

#### **Applicant:**

##### **Benefits**

- Would allow positive movement for students who have exceeded their required grades, and genuinely wish to move institution, without risking their original offer
- Applicants who have ready access to high quality and proactive advice will benefit
- The process will be more transparent than the current process.

##### **Risks**

- There is a risk that many more of the students who just miss their offers are disadvantaged by the process, should institutions decide to be unscrupulous and wait to see what applications they receive for adjustment. These students could find that they are kept waiting for a decision and therefore miss opportunities in clearing. It is likely that the 'just missed' group of students is much larger than those genuinely wanting to move because they have exceeded their offer

- There could be additional problems for those students whose results are in dispute, or where other examination results are awaited e.g. GCSE results
- Applicants who have ready access to high quality and proactive advice might be more likely to take this up, and therefore this will favour those students who are less likely to be in the widening participation groups
- Students may be disappointed if unable to secure a place through adjustment, which will mean that they will need to decide between accepting their CF institution, entering clearing, or applying again the following year
- More applicants could be 'forced' into taking a gap year
- Initial applicant choices may change, because they often think that they will do better than they do, thereby creating many more 'near miss' and 'rejected' students.

#### **Required or possible adverse behavioural change**

- This could induce many thousands more to want to take up the opportunity, which could have adverse effect on retention, and de-stabilise the HE system
- Well supported students may be under parental or school pressure to change their choice at confirmation, rather than take their original considered choice
- Students will need to think in advance whether, if they exceed their requirements, they would like to try to move to another institution
- Students will need to act quickly if they wish to place an adjustment application
- Students will need to understand the terms of their conditional offer sufficiently to enable them to judge whether they do exceed the requirements
- Students may make snap judgements, as in clearing, which are not necessarily the most appropriate
- Students need to be aware that seeking 'adjustment' does not guarantee that they will find a place, and that very popular programmes may not have the space to consider late applicants in this way
- Students and parents need to be made even more aware of need to be in the country when their results are published to ensure can carry out these processes.

#### **Schools/Colleges:**

##### **Benefits**

- More students placed at confirmation in institutions that they wish to attend.

##### **Risks**

- The length of time required for advisory services in August may increase
- Schools and colleges may have insufficient resources to train advisory staff, and to make high quality advisory services available to all students.

#### **Required or possible adverse behavioural change**

- Schools and colleges will need to ensure sufficient advice and guidance available to students, both prior to the results period, and after it

- A possible change in release of results dates may mean making staff available earlier than now
- Additional training need for staff in advisory positions.

#### **Awarding bodies:**

##### **Benefits**

- Earlier release of A-level and SQA results are probably not required.

##### **Risks**

- The timings and format of results for Diploma applicants are yet to be communicated to HEIs, and may have an effect.

#### **UCAS:**

##### **Benefits**

- The communications campaign which will be needed to explain the changes may result in better understanding of the UCAS process and better advice provided to students.

##### **Risks**

- Multiple technical developments and adjustments to the rules of scheme including: the ability to hold two offers at confirmation after UF stage, and if thought desirable, the introduction of a new process to allow students to 'accept' offers at UF/CAAdj stage. These will need to be appropriately planned and modelled to ensure that operationally they work before the developments 'go live'
- There could be complications with SLC processes if more students are changing original institution in August, and subsequent risk to ensuring finance is in place at the start of the year for these students.

#### **Required or possible adverse behavioural change**

- Multiple technical developments and adjustments to the rules of scheme will be required, including: the ability to hold two offers at confirmation after UF stage, and if thought desirable, the introduction of a new process to allow students to 'accept' offers at UF/CAAdj stage
- Additional training need for advisory staff within UCAS
- Considerable communications campaign required to explain the changes.

### **Model B: The extension of UCAS EXTRA at confirmation: EXTRA plus**

Students who really want to move, already by-pass the rules of the UCAS process and effect that move without risking their original choice, by gaining confirmation by a new institution that they can have a place before seeking release from their original institution.

Model B tries to provide a way in which they can do this legitimately, but by using existing facilities within the UCAS scheme, with some relatively minor additions compared with Model A.

The rules on contacting an institution when committed elsewhere could simply be relaxed, and advisors and applicants made more aware of this. Wishing to 'move up' could become a legitimate reason for asking for release, and where the reason was 'adjustment for academic reasons' this could be used in some way to protect the UF choice. The mechanism by which the applicant and new institution could communicate with each other could be through the UCAS EXTRA process, which could be made available at this time of year, although this might not be necessary.

Those seeking a move to another institution might however be required by the new institution to make an additional application justifying their choice. These need only be considered by institutions who wish to receive it, and this could be indicated prior to confirmation and clearing, again using the existing UCAS EXTRA processes of opening or closing programmes.

The main system change would be the facility to allow students who are holding an offer somewhere, to access the UCAS EXTRA process. It is currently only available to applicants who are not holding an offer, therefore technical changes will need to take place.

### **The process**

1. Institutions would behave as usual at confirmation and clearing.
2. Applicants who wished to 'adjust' would contact institutions by telephone, as they would in clearing, stating that they wished to be considered for an 'adjustment' place. Conversations would take place between the applicant and the institution, and the receiving institution would ask the student to use the EXTRA process to trigger the sending of the applicant's record from UCAS. This would also trigger a response to the UF institution to flag up applicants seeking a place elsewhere and therefore at risk of loss.

The student would still need to contact their original UF institution, and on agreeing release from the original UF institution the release status shows 'adjustment' – so that moving for academic reasons becomes a legitimate process.

### **Risks:**

It would be very difficult to ensure that the numbers seeking a change in this way did not become unmanageable.

Advisors would need to be given very clear advice about its use, and that its use should be in special circumstances only.

### **Higher Education Institutions:**

### **Benefits**

- Would require minimal change in process

- Meets the criteria of the Delivery Partnership in allowing students who have exceeded their offers, to seek another place, whilst not adding too many additional complications to the process
- Would help send the message that this can only happen in particular circumstances, and that it was not a 'free for all' where grades are the only criterion for entry
- Extends the use of EXTRA to the benefit of students
- Would help identification of clearing vs adjustment applicants.

### **Risks**

- Very few places would be available to students seeking adjustment
- As with Model A, there would remain an issue about 'just missed' applicants, and institutions holding back decisions on these, but it might be less marked with this process
- As with Model A, it could generate a lot of 'churn' in institutions that make mid-range conditional offers.

### **Required or possible adverse behavioural change**

- May tempt some to hold back 'just misseds' in favour of adjustment applicants, but possibly less so in early years
- Would require institutions to flag up those courses open to adjustment by course using current EXTRA process, and some institutions may not be happy to do this.

### **Applicant**

#### **Benefits**

- Will allow them to seek another place in relative safety, whilst holding on to their CF offer
- Changing their course and institution would mean that a student would have to be serious in this choice, which would be demonstrated through having to complete the additional application through EXTRA.

#### **Risks**

- There may be few places available for students wishing to move
- More students may be asked to take a gap year
- Some confusion in which process to use should EXTRA be available for these students
- Applicants who have ready access to high quality and proactive advice might be more likely to take this up, and therefore this will favour those students who are less likely to be in the widening participation groups
- As with Model A, students unable to secure a place through adjustment, may need to decide between accepting their CF institution, entering clearing, or applying again the following year.

### **Required or possible adverse behavioural change**

- May encourage more students to move, but possibly small numbers in early years

- May encourage those under parental and school pressure to try to find a better place
- Will require a new application through EXTRA although this may mean simply amending a personal statement
- Well supported students may be under parental or school pressure to change their choice at confirmation, rather than take their original considered choice
- Will need to think in advance whether, if they exceed their requirements, they would like to try to move to another institution
- Will need to act quickly if they wish to place an adjustment application
- Will need to understand the terms of their conditional offer sufficiently to enable them to judge whether they do exceed the requirements
- May make snap judgements, as in clearing, which are not necessarily the most appropriate
- Students and parents need to be made even more aware of need to be in the country when their results are published to ensure can carry out these processes.

### **Schools and colleges**

#### **Benefits**

- Would not need to change advisory services and availability of staff at confirmation significantly unless they were institutions where they may be a number of students wishing to change
- More students placed at confirmation in institutions that they wish to attend.

#### **Risks**

- The length of time required for advisory services in August may increase
- Schools and colleges may have insufficient resources to train advisory staff, and to make high quality advisory services available to all students.

#### **Required or possible adverse behavioural change**

- Would require real understanding of its use and who the change is intended to benefit
- As with Model A, sufficient advice and guidance must be available to students, both prior to the results period, and after it
- Possible change in release of results dates may mean making staff available earlier than now
- Additional training need for staff in advisory positions.

### **Awarding bodies**

#### **Benefits**

- Earlier release of A-level and SQA results are probably not required.

#### **Risks**

- The timings and format of results for Diploma applicants are yet to be communicated to HEIs, and may have an effect

## **UCAS**

### **Benefits**

- Fewer technical changes required than other models

### **Risks**

- Some technical change required that will need testing prior to operation
- Fewer technical developments and adjustments to the rules of scheme than Model A. These will need to be appropriately planned and modelled to ensure that operationally they work before the developments 'go live'
- Complications with SLC processes if more students are changing original institution in August, and subsequent risk to ensuring finance is in place at the start of the year for these students.

### **Required or possible adverse behavioural change**

- Advisors will need to understand the rules of the process
- Multiple technical developments and adjustments to the rules of scheme including: the ability to hold two offers at confirmation after UF stage, and if thought desirable, the introduction of a new process to allow students to 'accept' offers at UF/CAAdj stage
- Additional training need for advisory staff within UCAS.

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## RESPONSE FORM: MODELS TO IMPLEMENT AN ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

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If you would like to complete this consultation **on-line** please contact Fiona Waye, [Fiona.waye@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk](mailto:Fiona.waye@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk) and the paper will be emailed to you.

Please complete your response below and send / email it to Fiona Waye at Universities UK by **Monday 18 June:**

Fiona Waye  
Universities UK (DP Models to Implement an Adjustment Period)  
Woburn House  
20 Tavistock Square  
London, WC1H 9HQ

If you have any questions regarding the consultation please contact Fiona Waye at Universities UK.

<b>Are you responding on behalf of your institution?</b>	<b>YES</b>
If <b>NO</b> , please state on whose behalf you are responding e.g. Department/section within institution (admissions, international office, WP or widening access office, Medical School, etc) or as an individual:	

<b>Name of institution:</b>	<b>University of Cambridge</b>
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Type of institution	Please tick
University	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other HEI	<input type="checkbox"/>
State/maintained school	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent School	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sixth form College	<input type="checkbox"/>
FE College with HE	<input type="checkbox"/>
FE College without HE	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students' Union	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trades' Union	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connexions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aimhigher or other widening access body (such as LLN)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Location of institution	Please tick
England	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Northern Ireland	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scotland	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>

## RESPONSE FORM: INTRODUCTION OF AN ADJUSTMENT PROCESS

### CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

**1. Do you accept the reasons for the need for an adjustment period? i.e. that students who have done better than their CF offer, and who might wish to change institution at this stage, should be allowed to seek a place elsewhere without jeopardising their original choice?**

**NO**

*Comments:*

We accept the idea that those who have exceeded expectations might reasonably be given an opportunity to seek a place elsewhere, without jeopardising their original choice, if it is possible to devise a system practicably to facilitate this – a big if. However, we are far from convinced that “students who have done better than their CF offer” covers the same constituency. The levels of conditional offers set by HEIs are often, in our experience, set with an eye on recruitment, the thinking being that by setting an easily achieved offer the student will choose that HEI over one setting more demanding offers. Those who have really exceeded expectations are those who do better than their predicted grades – a much smaller number given that the vast majority of incorrect predictions are too high rather than too low.

#### **Model A:**

**1. Do you feel that the model as proposed would work?**

**NO**

*Comments:*

Well, yes, it would work in the sense that a system based on this model could be introduced and allowed to operate, but it is very hard to see how the resulting outcomes would represent a net improvement over the current system.

**2. Can you identify any additional benefits/risks for your own institution?**

**YES**

*Comments:*

Given the Delivery Partnership’s apparent reluctance to specify a definition for doing “better than their CF offer”, there is a huge risk that our admissions offices will be overwhelmed by enquiries from students who believe they have exceeded the terms of their AAA offer by obtaining AAA and a passing grade in General Studies A-level or a free-standing Maths unit or any of the myriad other qualifications that attract UCAS tariff points. Even within the current system we receive a significant number of enquiries from students seeking to “trade up”. Given the prestige ascribed by the world at large to gaining a place at Cambridge, we are convinced that vast numbers of students would try to trade up in August if they were able to do so without imperilling their CF/UF place. The tidal wave of enquiries this would generate would make it much more difficult for us to give careful and fair consideration to those who have narrowly missed offers from us and impossible to identify and consider any adjustment applicants from the demographic these proposals are intended to help, i.e. the inadequately advised widening participation student lacking in self-confidence.

**3. Can you identify any additional benefits/risks for other stakeholders?**

**YES**

*Comments:*

The anticipated behaviour identified above would obviously not benefit the genuinely deserving WP students who have exceeded expectations. It is also likely that a number of selective HEIs would be faced with the potential uncertainty created by hundreds of their CF/UF offer-holders making adjustment applications to Cambridge or Oxford, and indeed other HEIs deemed more prestigious than their CF/UF one.

**4. Would you need any additional time in the process to carry it out, if so at which stage?**

**YES**

*Comments:*

If we were to participate in such a system, which would only be possible if the number of potential adjustment applicants could be controlled to manageable proportions relative to the very small number of places likely to be available at this stage by strictly defining eligibility criteria (see the preceding comments), then we would want time to consider their applications in the same careful, holistic way that all our original applications had been considered. This process would almost certainly necessitate interviews and the sitting of aptitude tests. This might conceivably be manageable within three or four days of the deadline for expressions of interest in adjustments, if such applicants could be summoned for such assessments at short and inflexible notice.

**5. Would an additional time period be required, for example by implementing a moratorium on decisions going to applicants for 2 or 4 days following results i.e. Thursday and Friday (Saturday and Sunday?) of results week? This period could be used for expressions of interest in adjustment from applicants.**

**YES**

*Comments:*

Obviously in the circumstances described in our response to 4 an additional time period is needed. It is not clear, however, what useful purpose a moratorium on the communication of decisions to applicants will serve. Those who have met their offers will know this; those who have not and whom the CF HEI is no longer interested in admitting and who have no CI offer should be told this as soon as possible.

**6. Should there be a time limit imposed on students making 'adjustment' applications? How long? e.g. five days after the release of results?**

**YES**

*Comments:*

The longer this period is the longer the resolution of the situation of those who have narrowly missed the terms of their CF offer takes. If they have a CI offer the terms of which they have met then this creates uncertainty for the CI institution; if they have not the delay potentially impacts negatively on their prospects of finding a place through Clearing.

**7. Should an applicant who has been accepted at their adjustment institution be automatically rejected from their original choice, OR should applicants be allowed an additional stage to respond and accept and decline their offers at confirmation?**

**YES/NO**

*Comments:*

How can an either/or question be given a yes/no response?

Allowing applicants a choice between offers at this stage would encourage speculative adjustment applications and increase uncertainty in planning and numbers management for HEIs. Applicants who

have been accepted at their adjustment institution should be automatically rejected at their original choice.

**8. One of the suggestion is that applicants should be limited to making an 'adjustment' application to a course where they had previously applied, and either been rejected or declined an offer. Do you agree with this?**

**NO**

*Comments:*

This defeats the whole point of the exercise. If the adjustment phase is to allow those who aimed inappropriately low to aim higher then how is this objective achieved by restricting choice to their original targets?

**9. Related to Question 8 above, would applicants be eligible to apply to institutions or courses where they had previously been rejected, or could this be up to an institution in relation to a particular course? There would need to be a mechanism for managing this, and it could link to a central process for recording of feedback on 'reason for rejection'. Please comment if you have any views on this.**

*Comments:*

This should be up to an institution in relation to a particular course.

## **Model B**

**10. Do you feel that the model as proposed, extending the UCAS EXTRA process, which would require institutions to 'open' and 'close' programmes would work?**

**NO**

*Comments:*

Well, yes, it would work in the sense that a system based on this model could be introduced and allowed to operate, but it is very hard to see how the resulting outcomes would represent a net improvement over the current system. Despite the rhetoric this just seems to be a different implementation of Model A.

**11: Can you identify any additional benefits/risks for your own institution?**

**YES**

*Comments:*

See our response to Q2.

These concerns are amplified by the fact that it is not made definitively clear in the consultation document whether eligibility to enter the UCAS EXTRA process at the adjustment phase will be restricted to those who have exceeded (however defined) the terms of their CF offer or whether this will be a free-for-all.

**12. Can you identify any additional benefits/risks for other stakeholders?**

**YES**

*Comments:*

See our response to Q3.

**13. Would you need any additional time in the process to carry it out, if so at which stage?**

**YES**

*Comments:*

See our response to Q4.

**14. Should there be a time limit imposed on students making 'adjustment' applications? How**

<b>long? e.g. five days after the release of results?</b>
<b>YES</b> <i>Comments:</i> See our response to Q6.
<b>15. Do you agree with the requirement for the student to seek 'release' from their original institution, as the mechanism for confirming their offer at their new institution?</b>
<b>YES</b> <i>Comments:</i> This is important, if only as a matter of courtesy.
<b>16. One of the suggestions is that applicants should be limited to making an 'adjustment' application to a course where they had previously applied, and either been rejected or declined an offer. Do you agree with this?</b>
<b>NO</b> <i>Comments:</i> See our response to Q8.
<b>17. Related to question 16 above, would applicants be eligible to apply to institutions or courses where they had previously been rejected, or could this be up to an institution in relation to a particular course? There would need to be a mechanism for managing this, and it could link to a central process for recording of feedback on 'reason for rejection'. Please comment if you have any views on this.</b>
<i>Comments:</i> This should be up to an institution in relation to a particular course.
<b>General questions:</b>
<b>18. Which model is your preferred model?</b>
<b>Neither</b>
<b>19. How should applicants with missing grades be treated?</b>
<i>Comments:</i> Given it will be almost impossible for an adjustment institution to give an application proper consideration if grades are missing, it is difficult to see how such applicants can sensibly make adjustment applications. They should therefore be treated as now.
<b>20. Do you have any other suggestions or comments?</b>
<i>Comments:</i> As indicated in previous consultations, the University of Cambridge and its Colleges are strongly in favour of a genuine PQA system. This support is predicated on the assumptions that its introduction is supported by a public examination system that provides much finer-grained differentiation between students <u>and</u> measures reliably more of the attributes leading universities are looking for in applicants than the present one, and that the timetables associated with the system allow applications to be given the same full, careful, holistic consideration as now. Whilst we are, in principle, willing to give careful consideration to the implementation of a system whereby those who have genuinely exceeded expectations could be considered alongside our near-miss offer holders in a small gathered field to fill any remaining places at confirmation, the operability of such a system depends crucially on the numbers involved, and the proposals in this consultation paper offer no prospect of limiting adjustment applications to those they are actually intended to help,

i.e. the inadequately advised widening participation student lacking in self-confidence.