



Consultation on proposal to introduce a new tariff

SCORE's response to the UCAS consultation.

16 May 2014

1. Introduction

SCORE is a partnership of organisations, which aims to improve science education in UK schools and colleges by supporting the development and implementation of effective education policy. The partnership is currently chaired by Professor Julia Buckingham and comprises the Association for Science Education, Institute of Physics, Royal Society, Royal Society of Chemistry and Society of Biology.

On 9 April, the Department of Education and Ofqual announced a reform to the assessment of science A-levels that will fundamentally change the way in which A-level grades in the sciences are reported. The reform will require an essential shift in the way in which UCAS processes points for AS- and A-levels in the sciences and the way in which university admissions departments take into account this change.

In the UCAS proposal document, UCAS states the aim to 'accommodate the qualification reforms which are underway in the UK and other future changes'¹. SCORE believes it is vital that UCAS apply this aim by addressing the problems in tariff point allocation to the A-level sciences.

2. In summary

- Under the new system students' performance in practical science work will be assessed and reported separately from their A-level grade.
- The separate assessment of practical work will be reported as a pass or fail on students' certificates and will not contribute to their A-level grade.
- The proposal means that a student could fail their practical competence assessment and still achieve an A* in their science A-level.
- Without the implementation of an acknowledgement of the pass or fail grade under the new UCAS tariff system there is no common agreement as to how universities will use the separate mark.
- The practical competency mark will not contribute to performance measures within the school accountability system; therefore the new assessment arrangements run the risk of A-level grades being prioritized over practical competencies

3. Recommendations

SCORE strongly recommends that:

- The awarding organisations work together to make a pass mark in the practical competence assessment essential for any student aiming to achieve a high grade at A-level and UCAS engage in this process in order to incorporate the cap into the admissions system. SCORE believes that capping the grade that a student can achieve without a pass for the practical competence mark would ensure that practical work continues to be seen as an integral part of the process of learning and doing science in schools.
- UCAS and Ofqual join SCORE in engaging the users of the A-level sciences in degree subjects at universities across the UK in a dialogue about this change in order to raise awareness of the new system.

¹ [Consultation on proposal to introduce a new tariff](#); UCAS (April 2014)