

We hope to receive a high level of response to this consultation from all those who have a stake in the higher education admissions process. We want to understand as fully as possible those aspects of the proposals which you support and those which cause concern. Where there are perceived problems, we encourage you to put forward preferred solutions. All your responses will be carefully analysed and a summative report will be published in March 2012.

In order to assist with the analysis and evaluation of responses, we would be grateful if you would provide us with the information requested below. Please note that any information given will be held by us and will only be used for the purposes of consultation and research. You are not required to provide your name but we will treat your identity in confidence if you do give it to us.

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| **Name** |  |
| **Job title** |  |
| **Organisation** | **NUS** |

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|  **Are you replying as an individual or on behalf of your organisation?** |
| ***On behalf of NUS*** |

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| **Please indicate which of the following categories applies to you/your organisation?** |
| Higher Education - UniversityHigher Education - CollegeHigher Education – Private providerSchoolFE collegeApplicant or potential applicantParent of an applicant or potential applicantGovernment bodyNon-Government bodyHE sector bodyOther (please state) | ***Please enter one of these categories below:*****National representative body for students in the UK.**  |

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| **Application post-results: proposed system** |

 ***To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?***

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|  **(APR Consultation ref 23.6.1)****A system of application post-results would deliver a fairer admissions process because the applicant would submit actual results and the reliance on predicted grades would be removed** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:****1** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 23.6.2)****Applying post-results will not necessarily have positive impacts on equality and diversity.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:****2** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 23.6.3)****Two choices is an adequate number for Apply 2, allowing applicants both an aspirational and a more realistic application.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:****3** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 23.6.4)****A system of application post-results may encourage a mechanistic approach to admissions with contextual and other data used less effectively.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:****3** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 23.6.5)****The lack of flexibility in the proposed post-results system may mean that HEIs are forced to reject candidates they might have accepted in the current system.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****3*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 23.6.6)****Giving young applicants more time to make application decisions recognises how much they mature over the final year at school or college.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****1*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 23.6.7)****A post-results system will not be agile enough to provide a better experience for all groups of students; those with A levels, those with Scottish Highers and those with other academic or vocational qualifications.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****3*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 23.6.8) Please specify any particular group of students whose needs would be less well met in a post-results system** |
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| **Please enter any further comments about this section below** |
| While we recognise that UCAS have chosen two initial choices to maximise efficiency, **we would suggest that three initial choices would offer greater choice to students, and would generate efficiencies later in the process by ensuring more students are placed in Apply 2.** In our view the most important thing is to avoid as far as possible a scramble for places in late August and early September. We do not believe that a system of application with results will lead to a mechanistic approach to admissions – we are confident that the higher education sector has the capacity to develop innovative approaches to assessing applicants under the new regime, including making full and transparent use of contextual data in making admissions decisions. This could involve gathering data in advance of application, for example. Neither do we endorse the argument that a post-results system would mean that institutions would necessarily reject candidates they had previously accepted. For one thing, it depends on which candidates; if they accept other more qualified candidates as a result of the new system this makes no ultimate difference in the process. Likewise if candidates are accepted but fail to reach their target grades their prior acceptance becomes a burden rather than something of value. More importantly, it is for institutions to work to make the system work. No system can deliver an ideal experience for every candidate. We believe the proposed system maximises fair access to higher education. Certainly any argument about benefits for the majority of students does not stand in this instance; the majority of students are relatively privileged in comparison to the rest of the population and a fair system will seek to lessen barriers for the disadvantaged minority in the hope of moving towards a fairer more representative balance. |

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| **Application post-results: widening participation** |

***To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?***

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| **(APR Consultation ref 24.8.1)****A wider group of applicants would be encouraged to make more aspirational applications with the confidence of knowing they have achieved appropriate qualification results.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 24.8.2)****Applicants would be deterred from making aspirational applications by having to make decisions quickly and being restricted to two choices.**  |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****3*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 24.8.3)****Applicants may not understand the importance of contextual data and would be deterred from applying for some courses if they have not achieved the grades.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****3*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 24.8.4)****Widening participation would be supported by more constructive and focussed advice and guidance.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****1*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 24.8.5) How do you think a system of application post results could be managed to enable it to promote widening participation?** |
| We appreciate that where a candidate receives unexpectedly good results s/he may be encouraged to apply to a more selective institution as a result. We do not, however, see this as a key benefit of the proposed system; we believe in students finding the institution and course that is right for them and would expect work to widen participation to both selective and less selective institutions to continue as it does currently. We do, however, believe that the longer lead-time to application will help students to be more aware of their intellectual strengths and preferences when making their choices, and would certainly not expect choices to become *less* aspirational. We would be surprised if applicants fully understood contextual data, but the solution to this is better information for teachers, college staff, applicants and particularly parents, and greater transparency on the part of HE institutions in when and how they use data of this sort. **We would also suggest that where an applicant is applying in the expectation of contextual data being taken into account, that these applications be made outside the standard number of initial choices.**  |

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| **Please enter any further comments about this section below** |
| NUS is aware that while the public information agenda is to be welcomed, this can never be a replacement for adequate, informed advice and guidance or indeed, for the experience of visiting an institution, speaking to staff and students and considering the appropriate ‘fit’. We believe strongly that extending the length of time available to candidates to seek advice, explore options and spend time at higher education institutions will be of inestimable value.Advice and guidance should improve continuously whatever the system of application to higher education, and this is certainly a key feature of widening participation. We do not particularly believe that the proposed system would guarantee improvements to advice and guidance, but it would certainly create more space for this to occur. A system of application post-results would, however, enable much more informed choices to be made.  |

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| **Application post-results: Efficiency improvements** |

***To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?***

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| **(APR Consultation ref 25.18.1)****A post-results system is an efficient system as fewer applications require processing by HEIs.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 25.18.2)****A more efficient streamlined process would enable HEIs to make financial savings.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****Can’t say*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 25.18.3)****A more streamlined process would make the process easier for applicants to navigate.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **(APR Reference 25.18.4) What disadvantages in terms of process efficiency, if any, could be experienced by HEIs, applicants or advisers as a result of a post-results system?** |
| We would expect initially that the process will in actual fact be harder for applicants to navigate, and a sustained campaign of information and advice will be crucial to support the switchover and maximise the benefits of the system as early as possible. Applicants may feel panicked by the short time frame for making the initial application, they may wish to apply remotely, they may find Apply 3 (where they apply to one institution after another in sequence) stressful or frustrating or demoralising. Once the system is embedded these problems will reduce, but we should anticipate them as much as possible.  |

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| **Application post-results: International and part-time students** |

***To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?***

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| **(APR Consultation ref 26.5.1)****It is desirable for international applicants to apply through a centralised system and not direct to HEIs.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 26.5.2)****It is desirable for part-time applicants to apply through a centralised system and not direct to HEIs.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 26.5.3)****Access to improved data about international and part-time applications will be a benefit of being part of a central admissions service.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |
| **(APR Consultation ref 26.5.4)****The proposed new process has the capacity to offer greater flexibilities which will support international and part-time admissions.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **Please enter any further comments about this section below** |
| It is desirable for international students to apply through a centralised system as this minimises the burden and cost to the student, ensures a ‘one-stop-shop’ for finding comparable information about different institutions and ensures that incomplete applications are caught and stopped, making the overall system more efficient. International students should be assessed alongside UK and EU student applicants to ensure fairness – a central system supports this, along with useful institution-wide and national data on these students. The same principles apply to part-time students. However, it would seem reasonable to allow any student who is qualified for any given higher education course to opt out of the UCAS system, for example, if they only wished to apply to one institution. Mature and part-time students in particular may prefer to avoid the UCAS process and if institutions wish to recruit these students they may wish to continue to offer this option. We cannot be entirely sure what specific benefits would accrue to part-time or international students in general, but certainly a system that supports a very clear process of application and response will be of value to part-time and international students, especially those who are less familiar with higher education in the UK.  |

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| **Application post-results: Examination, results and applications timetable** |

***To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?***

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| **(APR Consultation ref 28.7.1)****The changes to the examination timetable should not have a major impact on the accuracy of assessment; with appropriate changes to their systems, awarding bodies should be able to maintain accuracy and rigour in a shorter marking period.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****Can’t say*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 28.7.2)****The option of starting the HE term for first year students in late October is worthy of consideration.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 28.7.3)****The option of starting the HE term for first year students in January is worthy of consideration.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 28.7.4)****The resources available in schools and colleges will be sufficient to give students support to make applications and manage offers in the timescale proposed.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****Can’t say*** |

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| **(APR Reference 28.7.5) What provisions could be made within the educational and qualification structures in Scotland to make a UK system of application post-results workable for Scottish students?** |
| **The following is the view of NUS Scotland:**We welcome the introduction of a potential two stage process for those applicants with existing results, i.e. students with pre-existing higher results who have elected to stay on and sit their advanced Highers. This provides flexibility and greater freedom of choice for these students, and may serve to lessen some of the administrative burden on UCAS and universities if they accept offers made during this process, meaning that they elect not to apply again on the basis of their advanced Highers during Apply 2. It should, however, be noted that the staying on rate from S5 to S6 is 54 per cent, meaning that almost half of the Scottish school population elect to move on after completing their Highers, and do not stay on to complete advanced Highers; therefore only half will have the opportunity to benefit from the proposed Apply 1 phase. For us, this means that there must be robust assurances around teaching and exam time, and a clear parity of opportunity between Scottish and rest-of-UK students. Under the proposed system, Scottish school students would receive their exam results at around roughly the same time as the end of term at Scottish. This does pose a worry that there will be insufficient time to consult teachers and school support staff on their results, and what their options are, owing to holidays etc. We do recognise, however, that this is not an issue which UCAS can resolve, and instead must lie with individual schools.As noted in the review document, and elsewhere, too often predicted grades are wrong (in both directions), and this is especially true for the most deprived in our society. A ongoing issue of Scottish tertiary education is that it performs the poorest of all the home nations in terms of widening access, and as such we welcome the opportunity for applications based on actual grades as a means of potentially improving widening access. However, this should not come at the expense of robust IAG, and equally should not diminish the use of contextual information in admissions.  |

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| **(APR Reference 28.7.6) What steps could be taken to secure parity for Northern Irish applicants whose school term currently ends at the end of June?** |
| It will be in most cases for Northern Irish schools in consultation with government, students and representative bodies such as teaching unions to determine the appropriate response to this problem. It may be possible, for example, to create a ‘hotline’ of advisors for an appropriate period or even to consider extending the school term.  |

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| **Please enter any further comments about this section below** |
| NUS feels it is for awarding bodies to determine whether accuracy of results can be maintained in a shorter marking period or whether schools will be able to provide appropriate advice and guidance during this time. We would observe that both these are highly important to the ultimate success of the proposed system. As far as term start dates are concerned we feel it is reasonable to ask schools/colleges and universities to lose an equal amount of teaching time, and so late October is a reasonable start date, as is January (October is preferable). The time could be made up at a different point in the year, potentially. One thing to consider is the need to sustain provision of a sufficient induction period, in particular for students or courses who need extra induction time for any reason. The impact of a later start or end date on international students and, by association, the international competitiveness of our UK institutions, would need to be considered as well. Ideally the change would not come about at the expense of teaching time at Level 3.  |

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| **Application post-results: Proposed timetable changes** |

***To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?***

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| **(APR Consultation ref 29.4.1)****An earliest start date of circa 8October for first year students would not have a serious impact on the delivery of HE courses.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |
| **(APR Consultation ref 29.4.2)****Universities could make appropriate resources available to make offer decisions and process applications between mid-July and end August.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 29.4.3) Please give any suggestions about what needs to be done to ensure that interviews can be successfully completed within the proposed model of applications post-results.** |
| In principle portfolios might be submitted or auditions or interviews take place in the spring, before the actual application is submitted. This would also in some cases allow candidates to get to know their chosen course or university better before making their application.  |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 29.4.4) Please give any suggestions how to accommodate applications for courses requiring auditions or the submissions of portfolios.** |
| For courses in the creative and performing arts the main thing would be to ensure a common deadline for those submitting work to or auditioning for those courses.  |

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| **Please enter any further comments about this section below** |
| Broadly NUS believes that while interview enables highly selective institutions to make fine discriminations between highly-qualified candidates, these have not traditionally supported fair access. Having interviews earlier than application would on the one hand give applicants time on campus, but the current system of private school privilege and intensive interview preparation would still apply and there is a serious danger that Oxbridge and the like would appear even more out of reach to the less well-informed. Moreover, in the absence of predicted grades these institutions would have to find a different way to select people for interview, probably through an entrance exam or through opting out of the UCAS system altogether, which would be a highly negative outcome. We are genuinely unsure how this might pan out, but we are absolutely certain that the system as a whole should not be abandoned because it does not suit highly selective institutions. This is an issue that should be carefully considered and debated.On the matter of interviews for courses such as medicine that serve purposes in addition to determining the best-qualified candidates, we believe these could be undertaken before the actual point of application without detriment to the applicant.  |

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| **Application post-results: Benefits and risks of the proposed 2014 year of entry enhancements** |

***To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?***

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| **(APR Consultation ref 31.3.1)****A single offer date for all applications would help minimise the real or perceived advantages of applying as early as possible in the cycle.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****1*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 31.3.2)****The current process can be improved with a more disciplined approach to deadlines, service level agreements for decision-making by HEIs, with no informal agreements to relax them.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 31.3.3)****The replacement of Clearing with a managed process of applications with equal consideration for places available at that point would give students a more positive experience and achieve a better match of applicants to courses.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****1*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 31.3.4)****A short break between Confirmation and Apply 3 would help to improve the process to place applicants after they have received their results.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****1*** |

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| **Please enter any further comments about this section below** |
| NUS wholeheartedly agrees with all the proposed improvements to be initiated in 2014. A more fixed system that is more transparent to applicants and minimises impressions that the system can be gamed is fairer and better. As pressure on student places continues, the only way to ensure admissions are as fair as possible is to apply the same rules, formally and transparently, to everybody. Replacing Clearing with a managed system of allocation of places will be very welcome. Although some applicants may wish to apply in Clearing immediately on receipt of results an enforced pause between results and Clearing will allow applicants to consider their options and seek information before revising their choices, and allow institutions to determine exactly what places are available and take steps to publicise these. We are very pleased to see that from 2014 tailored personal statements will be supported through the UCAS system. |
| **The insurance choice** |

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| **Option** | **Description** | **Benefits** | **Disadvantages** |
| Keep insurance choice as is | A contractually-binding 2nd choice, intended to offer a safety net to applicants not meeting the conditions of their firm choice | Supports applicants in making aspirational choices | Evidence shows that it is not well understood by applicants and is not used wisely |
| Remove insurance choice | Applicants accept one conditional offer and enter Clearing if they don’t meet the conditions | Facilitates HEIs in managing their numbers | Does not support applicants in making aspirational choices; disadvantages recruiting institutions for whom the insurance choice may represent an important pool of applicants |
| Enforce correct use of insurance choice | Application system ensures that applicant has included at least one choice with lower entry requirements  | Supports applicants in using the insurance choice as it was intended; fewer applicants needing to enter Clearing | Simple business rules don’t reflect complexity of offers and what appears to be an unwise insurance choice may in reality not be, for instance for courses like medicine where the option for entry with lower grades does not exist.  |
| Make insurance choice optional for HEIs | HEIs choose whether applicants can accept them as an insurance choice or only as a firm choice | HEIs for whom insurance choice is beneficial can continue with it; applicants can choose to apply to HEIs that accept insurance choice | More complex than current process and has capacity for unfairness |
| Replace insurance choice with priority wait list option | Applicant chooses one firm choice and can be added to wait list for up to four others. HEI gives priority to waitlisted applicants once CFs have been confirmed | Provides some back-up for applicant but not contractually binding on HEI so facilitates number management | Provides less certainty for applicants than current process. Is complex and would be difficult to implement |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 32.5)****In light of the information given above, please rank the options above in your preferred order (using 1 as the most effective through to 5 as the least effective).** |
| **Option** | **Rank 1 to 5** |
| Keep insurance choice as is | 1 |
| Remove insurance choice | 4 |
| Enforce correct use of insurance choice | 2 |
| Make insurance choice optional for HEIs | 5 |
| Replace insurance choice with priority wait list option | 3 |

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| **Please enter any further comments about this section below** |
| NUS recognises that a large number of applicants are not making appropriate use of the insurance choice. However we are not in favour of any of the proposed alternatives for the reasons outlined below. Our preferences rank as follows: 1. Keep insurance choice as is – but work on helping applicants better understand its function and purpose, and flag to applicants on the online system where their insurance offer is the same as or higher than their firm offer.
2. Enforcing correct use of the insurance choice - this could be inappropriate for certain applicants; this option would be suitable if there was override function or a flag, as stated above. Enforcement on an online system is usually a bad idea because the system cannot then deal with diversity.
3. Replace insurance choice with priority wait list option – this would work if institutions commit to it but will be very complex to administer and seems silly to introduce if moves to a post-results system are scheduled for 2016. If, however, the post-results system does not get implemented this option would be worth exploring in more depth.
4. Removing the insurance choice would be unpopular among applicants and would result in greater numbers of students entering Clearing.
5. Make insurance choice optional for HEIs – we feel this will be unfair and drive a wedge between selecting and recruiting institutions.
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| **Timetable for reform** |

***To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?***

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| **(APR Consultation ref 33.2.1)****2016 year of entry is a manageable start date for a system of applications post-results.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 33.2.2)****2014 year of entry is a manageable date to be ready for the proposed changes to the current system.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 33.2.3)****We believe that the proposed changes for 2016 year of entry and 2014 year of entry are workable solutions.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****1*** |

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| **(APR Consultation ref 33.2.4)****If the proposal for 2016 year of entry does not go ahead, further refinements are needed to the 2014 process.** |
| **1- strongly agree2- agree3- disagree4- strongly disagree** | **Enter number between 1 – 4 below:*****2*** |

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| **Please enter any further comments about this section below** |
| If 2016 proposals are not adopted we do believe that further refinements could be introduced to 2014 plans, including further review of the insurance choice, considering how contextual data is integrated fully into the admissions process and whether there is space for application using contextual data outside the existing system, and whether postgraduate admissions should be better integrated into the wider system. |

For more information about the UCAS admissions process review, please visit:

[www.ucas.com/admissionsprocessrreview](http://www.ucas.com/admissionsprocessrreview)

**Responses must be received in UCAS by 20 January 2012.**

Please complete, save and return this document via email to:

admissionsprocessreview@ucas.ac.uk