

UCAS

ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE:

ALLOCATING UCAS TARIFF POINTS TO
APPRENTICESHIPS AT LEVEL 3 (IN ENGLAND,
WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND) AND SCQF LEVEL
6 (MODERN APPRENTICESHIPS IN SCOTLAND)

MAY 2024



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INTRODUCTION

Every year, UCAS supports nearly 1.5 million students in exploring their post-secondary choices. As part of this, we assist 700,000 students in making nearly 3 million applications to over 350 universities and colleges across the UK. Qualifications serve as the currency for progression, with applicants from across the UK presenting hundreds of different Level 3/SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework) Level 6 qualifications to demonstrate their suitability for particular courses. Given the diversity of qualifications, some universities and colleges express offers and entry requirements using the UCAS Tariff.

UCAS has received consistent feedback from stakeholders regarding the allocation of Tariff points to apprenticeships. Within this document, UCAS sets out a proposed model to allocate Tariff points to apprenticeships at Level 3 (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and SCQF Level 6 (Scotland – Modern Apprenticeships). The model seeks to:

- ▶ Aid higher education providers to understand the size and scope of a learner's apprenticeship in the same context as other post-16 programmes of study at Level 3/SCQF Level 6.
- ▶ Help applicants that have achieved an apprenticeship understand options for their next steps should they wish to enter higher education, and support advisers working with applicants.

This document then sets out questions about the proposed model for feedback. We are keen to hear as many voices as possible; from apprentices, students, providers, advisers, employers, parents, and interested organisations. We know that many people will hold views and we welcome these.





WHY ARE WE SEEKING TO ALLOCATE TARIFF POINTS TO APPRENTICESHIPS AT THIS LEVEL?

About UCAS Tariff points

UCAS Tariff points are allocated to help articulate entry criteria and provide a high-level overview of a qualification to support the management information needs of higher education providers. Tariff points are allocated to regulated Level 3/SCQF Level 6 qualifications and Foundation Apprenticeships in Scotland. The UCAS Tariff was first introduced in 2001, initially for a narrow range of qualifications such as A Levels and SQA (Scottish Qualification Authority) Highers, to provide a numerical score across qualification grades and to offer flexibility in setting entry requirements for institutions that may have greater flexibility in their admissions criteria. Over time, the range of qualifications that attracted UCAS Tariff points expanded. In 2017, alongside the first award of the reformed A Level and decoupled AS Level, UCAS introduced a new Tariff. This version of the Tariff acted as a broad metric based on a qualification's size and grading structure, with its primary purpose being to support management of information in higher education. The revised methodology presented the opportunity to allocate Tariff points to a broader range of qualifications, and in 2022, Tariff points were allocated to all regulated Level 3/SCQF Level 6 qualifications.¹

To date, apprenticeships at Level 3/SCQF Level 6 (Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland) have not carried Tariff points. To better support students' visibility of pathways to higher education, enhance guidance for admissions teams and in response to demand from the apprenticeship sector, UCAS wants to include apprenticeships in the UCAS Tariff system.

Universities and colleges are autonomous in their admissions decisions. They consider and accept a broad range of educational backgrounds for entry to higher education. The UCAS Tariff system has been used for many years to enable providers to draw broad comparisons between post-16 qualifications as part of their admissions processes. The number of Tariff points that a student has accrued is a component of a wider admissions process that considers other factors, such as a personal statement and work experience. Additionally, not all providers use Tariff points for entry, and those that do may not use Tariff points for entry on all courses, or accept all qualifications that attract Tariff points. Information on typical acceptance levels can be found on the [UCAS Grades on Entry tool](#).

UCAS plays a central role in supporting applicants, providers and advisers to understand how qualifications and apprenticeships support progression to HE (higher education), and the allocation of Tariff points to Level 3/SCQF Level 6 apprenticeships is part of an overarching approach to supporting higher education providers understand this provision. We will use our information and advice to empower those with apprenticeships to apply and progress to higher education.

For more information about the UCAS Tariff, visit ucas.com.

¹ For information on levels and equivalents, visit [QAA](#).

Our aim

UCAS aims to assign Tariff points to apprenticeships at this level to support the understanding of higher education of a broader range of post-16 pathways and to support those individuals undertaking apprenticeships access higher education. However, we recognise that the Tariff is only a small part of this, and this development will sit alongside enhanced guidance for higher education admissions teams to aid broad comparison with other qualifications at this level.



THE APPROACH TO ALLOCATING TARIFF POINTS TO LEVEL 3 AND SCQF LEVEL 6 APPRENTICESHIPS

UCAS proposes that a Tariff score is applied to an apprenticeship as a complete programme of study, by which UCAS means: the paid work element; the on-the-job learning element; the off-the-job study element and any Level 3/ SCQF Level 6 qualification achieved through the apprenticeship.

Guiding principles

To reach a fair and equitable outcome in associating UCAS Tariff points with apprenticeships across all nations of the UK, UCAS has been considering a variety of models that seek to adhere to the following principles:

1. A comparable measure of size for apprenticeship provision. This references the amount of time spent in study and work.
2. A comparable measure of standard for Level 3 and SCQF Level 6 apprenticeships.
3. A method that manages the variance of differing apprenticeship structures across the UK, including grading so that no student is disadvantaged based on the nation that they achieved their apprenticeship in.
4. Alignment with conventional Tariff methodology. Adhering to the methodology when allocating points to apprenticeships ensures the integrity of all comparisons within the Tariff, thereby aiding fairer admissions decisions.

Success measures

1. Increased awareness of the possibility of progression from apprenticeship to HE for apprentices.
2. Increased understanding of applicants, advisers and admissions professionals of how to use Tariff points for apprenticeships.

Once a Tariff point model is being used, we will review progress at an appropriate time.



THE UCAS PROPOSAL

How Tariff point models work

Tariff points are calculated by allocating a size band and one or more grade bands (GB) (depending on whether the programme being tarified is graded or ungraded) and multiplying these together. In the case of qualifications, the size band is determined by the Guided Learning Hours (GLH), or SCQF Credits for qualifications offered in Scotland. For example, if a programme only has one outcome such as a 'pass', it will be given a grade band of 8. If it has three outcomes such as an 'Pass', 'Merit' and 'Distinction', these outcomes will be distributed across the range of grade bands, show in the illustration here².

How Tariff points are calculated

GLH	SCQF	Size Band
<120	0 to 11	1
120-219	12 to 21	2
220-319	22 to 31	3
320-499	32 to 49	4
500-719	50 to 71	6
720-999	72 to 99	8
1000+	100+	12

GB	1 Grade	2 Grade	3 Grade	4 Grade	5 Grade	6 Grade	7 Grade
14						1	1
13							
12			1	1	1	2	2
11							
10		1			2	3	3
9				2			
8	1		2		3	4	4
7							
6		3			4	5	5
5							
4			3	4	5	6	6
3							7

$$\text{Size band} \times \text{Grade band(s)} = \text{Tariff Points}$$

² Grade 8 is allocated to qualifications on the NQF (National Qualification Framework) with a pass only grade unless regulated information suggests different.

Proposed model

For apprenticeships, UCAS proposes that the size band is determined by the expected duration of the apprenticeship in months, based on regulated data, acknowledging that there is no perfect measure of size. We also propose that a pass is an achievement of occupational competency, which is the desired outcome of any apprenticeship, and therefore should be the criterion to meet across all four nations.

Apprenticeships with a duration of 36 months or higher will receive the highest size band on the scale, 14. Those with an expected duration of 12-17 months receive the lowest size band, 6. In the preferred model, shown here, size bands are consistent across all UK nations. We acknowledge that there are varying durations across the four nations, with 2 years the maximum in Northern Ireland.

The proposed model for allocating Tariff points to apprenticeships allocates a grade band 8 to the "Pass" grade. This grade band is consistent across all UK nations, meaning passing an apprenticeship with an expected duration of 24 months or higher will result in the same Tariff point allocation, regardless of the nation in which the apprenticeship was taken. The apprenticeship 'pass' aligns to the same number of Tariff points (96) attracted by 3 'C's at A Level or a 'Pass' at T Level. This alignment positions an apprenticeship 'pass' for a two year programme as equivalent to the accepted benchmark of a 'pass' at A Level or T Level.

- ▶ Higher size band allocation for apprenticeships of an extended length (4+4+4+2)
- ▶ Points for completion of an apprenticeship - no recognition of higher grades achieved in an EPA
- ▶ 2-year apprenticeship aligns with T Level Pass grade with A* - C in the core or A Level CCC
- ▶ Alignment of points for apprenticeships across the UK
- ▶ Scottish MAs will use SCQF Credits instead of Duration, but with same outcome of points
- ▶ Typical entry criteria is 72 to 128 Tariff points for Year 1 entry, and 32 to 64 for a FY entry

Duration	Size band	Grade	Grade band	Tariff points
36 months +	14 (4+4+4+2)	P	8	112
24 months	12 (4+4+4)	P	8	96
18 months	8 (4+4)	P	8	64
12 months	6 (4+2)	P	8	48

3

Note: Scottish Modern Apprenticeships will use SCQF Credits to inform their size band. However, this will not affect the outcome in terms of Tariff points, with all four nations being aligned in allocating of points.

3 EPA (End point assessment) – Applicable only to apprenticeships in England. MA (Modern Apprenticeship)



Development of the proposed model

At the outset of UCAS' engagement with the sector in Spring 2023, we began with a simple approach that allocated 96 Tariff points to all Level 3/SCQF Level 6 apprenticeships, equivalent 3 C grades at A Level or a Pass at T Level. In response to ongoing feedback taken from stakeholders during the subsequent months, several models were developed and considered. These included iterations that recognised the differing durations of apprenticeships, the achievement of English apprentices that are awarded a merit or distinction grade, and apprenticeships in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that have an embedded qualification.

After considering all the feedback gathered from our engagement with the sector, it was decided that the differences in duration of apprenticeships should be recognised, but that it was unfair for English apprentices to be able to claim a higher number of tariff points for a merit or distinction grades whereas apprentices in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland do not have the opportunity to achieve a grade higher than a pass. Feedback also suggested that allocating Tariff Points an apprenticeship and an embedded qualification would be regarded as 'double counting' and so this model was also discarded. In cases where the embedded qualification attracts higher points than the apprenticeship, applicants will be able to select the higher of the two to use in their application.

UCAS believes that the proposed model meets the guiding principles set out at the beginning of the project and promotes fairness for apprentices across the UK.

Engagement to date

UCAS has been engaging with regulators, governments, sector bodies, apprenticeship training providers, HE providers, awarding bodies, apprentices, and wider stakeholders – totalling over 60 organisations. We have shared iterative ideas for models. Feedback has centred around the following themes:

The need

The majority of those engaged believe that there is a need for Tariff points for apprenticeships at this level to support progression to HE and to position UK apprenticeships on an equal footing with A Levels, T Levels and other Level 3/SCQF Level 6 programmes of study. The voices of training providers, FE colleges and some employers were notably strong on this.

The level of points in comparison to other qualifications

A diversity of views were taken regarding the comparison of apprenticeships to other programmes of study. Some felt that apprenticeships could be seen as being undervalued in comparison to other Level 3/SCQF Level 6 qualifications in some models. Others thought that a Tariff score that was equivalent to that of 3 'A's at A Level would not be credible. The overall sense was that the equivalence of a two year apprenticeship to 3 C grades at A Level or a pass at T Level was acceptable.

Duration

There were a range of views regarding the use of expected duration, as published by regulators, of an apprenticeship to inform the size band. Concerns were raised about the differences in expected duration across the four nations, with apprentices in England being able to secure higher Tariff points for a three-year apprenticeship, whereas apprentices in Northern Ireland would not have the opportunity to undertake an apprenticeship with a similar expected duration. Additionally, there were questions about whether using this measure could create potential incentives to lengthen durations of apprenticeships.

Grading

Some models UCAS explored have additional, higher grade bands for merit and distinction where they were possible in End Point Assessment (EPA) in England. Concerns were voiced about the potential for English apprentices to achieve a higher number of Tariff points if they were awarded a 'merit' or 'distinction', where apprentices in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are limited to a 'pass' or 'fail' outcome.

Recognising qualifications that are part of apprenticeships

Challenges were raised about how a qualification – where it is part of an apprenticeship – would be considered, notably where the qualifications might have Tariff points that are higher than that awarded based on the duration of an apprenticeship.

Information and guidance

Clear feedback was given about the need for building sufficient understanding for applicants, advisers and HE providers in a roll out of points for apprenticeships at this level. UCAS will provide a comprehensive package of information and guidance.



YOUR FEEDBACK: QUESTIONS

To help assess UCAS's proposed approach to assigning Tariff points to apprenticeship: we invite feedback on the following questions:

- ▶ To what extent do you support the proposed model?
- ▶ Guidance proposed by regulators indicates that recommended duration (or credit for Scottish apprenticeships) is the best measure of size. To what extent do you support that this is the best measure of size for this purpose?
- ▶ We have not allocated grade bands above pass to ensure fairness across all nations of the UK, as apprentices in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland do not have an opportunity to achieve a merit or distinction grade as English apprentices do. Do you agree with this approach?
- ▶ To what extent do you agree that the proposed model meets our guiding principles, as set out on **page 6** of this document?
- ▶ Is there anything that we have not considered in this paper that you would like to share thoughts on?
- ▶ Extended responses – If you would like to submit a longer form response, please submit here.

Feedback can be submitted on our [website](#).

The survey will be open for four weeks **and will close on the 20th of June 2024**. Responses will be analysed and reviewed, and a report provided as part of the outcome. If UCAS concludes that the proposed model is a viable solution based on feedback, it will be applied to UK Level 3 and SCQF Level 6 Apprenticeships from September 2024.

UCAS

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