

2025 Dates and Deadlines outcomes

UCAS reviewed two deadlines currently operating in the application process to ensure that they continue to support providers and applicants, as well as advisers working with students. This report outlines the key findings from the survey and confirms that the dates for the 2025 cycle will be as follows:

Equal consideration deadline: last Wednesday in January i.e. 29/01/2025

Reject by default date: second Wednesday in May i.e. 14/05/2025

Background

In reviewing the January Equal Consideration deadline, UCAS wanted to understand sector feedback on the changes made in 2021, and make a positive decision about where to place this deadline from 2025 so that it:

- Brings the providers' reject by default date forward to minimise the number of students receiving rejections in the middle of their exam periods;
- Maximises the time available between application and decision deadlines to ensure providers can make fair and robust assessments and decisions;
- Offers sufficient time for advisers to support their students in meeting application deadlines, and allows students themselves to complete their applications.

Three variations were proposed:

1. Maintain current January ECD (last Wednesday of January) and May RBD (second Wednesday)
2. Move January ECD to second Wednesday in January, and RBD to first Wednesday in May
3. Move January ECD to third Wednesday in December, and RBD to last Wednesday in April.

UCAS sent out the consultation to providers, advisers, and key stakeholder groups, and collected feedback on the options via a survey, where participants were asked to rank the three variations in order of preference. A "Do not support" option was also included, along with a free text box for any additional comments, which were analysed. Student sentiment had been previously captured via UCAS's Student Mindset work; students were also given the opportunity to complete the survey.

2000 responses were received with the split between respondents as below; a mix of schools and colleges from both home and international markets responded, alongside a wide range of providers and representative organisations and groups.

Customer group	Count
Other	102
Provider	209
Student	222
Teacher or advisor	1467
Grand Total	2000

The preferred option for all groups was to maintain the current January and May deadlines with 55% choosing this as their first choice. There was limited appetite for moving the ECD before Christmas, with 53% choosing the “Do not support” option. This was mainly driven by concern for applicants – comments mentioned groups of students needing more time to make choices, for example those from more disadvantaged backgrounds; and about all students needing time to make an informed choice about their options, for example by using mock exam results to guide their thinking. Some comments highlighted that moving the deadline before Christmas might mean that applicants have to wait longer for decisions due to traditional Christmas closures at providers.

Customer group	Maintain current deadline	Move ECD to 2nd week in Jan	Move ECD to December
Other	58.82%	25.49%	15.69%
Provider	49.76%	38.28%	10.05%
Student	57.21%	19.37%	22.52%
Teacher or advisor	54.60%	25.49%	18.27%
Total	54.60%	26.15%	17.75%

Percentage of responses choosing option as preferred choice

“The current January ECD allows for legitimate significant movement in students’ aspirations after the thinking time allowed by the Christmas break.”

“I think it works well and allows time for students to improve predicted grades and develop understanding of options available.”

“Keeping the end of January deadline allows applicants more time to gather information, consider their options, and make informed decisions about their future. This alleviates the stress associated with meeting tight deadlines and empowers students to choose courses that align with their aspirations and abilities.”

Advisors and providers were also generally positive about the impact that a January deadline had on staff workload in terms of spreading it out over a longer period of time. However, there was some ambivalence in comments, with some respondents clarifying that they would also be happy with an earlier deadline in January (the old 15th January deadline and/or the third Wednesday of January was mentioned in a

small percentage of responses) as a compromise to move the RBD to an earlier date. Some centres mentioned that their experience reflected UCAS modelling in that students tended to apply close to the deadline, no matter when that was, and this puts increased pressure on school resources.

Apply centres discussed the practice that occurs in schools and colleges of setting internal deadlines, often before Christmas, for students to submit applications. Alongside this, some advisors had a clear preference for having a December deadline, to allow students to focus on work and to provide a clear break for students and staff over Christmas. **Understanding of internal deadlines vs the UCAS deadline by students is helpful to support advisors in managing workload and expectations – UCAS will look to see what it can do to support this.**

Students receiving decisions close to exams was recognised as potentially being problematic; a minority of free-text responses suggested keeping the January ECD as it and moving the May RBD earlier – this was not proposed as an option in the consultation as it does not meet one of the key objectives for this piece of work of maximising the time between deadlines to support providers. As providers receive increasing numbers of applications from highly qualified applicants, they need additional time to be able to fairly process those applications. Some suggestions around reducing the number of choices were proposed to mitigate this; UCAS will be looking at this in further detail. It was acknowledged that none of the options presented entirely removed the RBD conflict for students outside of England, due to all proposed RBDs being in exam periods. **UCAS recognise this, and in response will be working with providers around best practice in this area to minimise disruption to students for the 2024 cycle and beyond.**

“Students need to have their decisions well before exams start and study leave starts - it is not helpful to be receiving uni decisions mid exams and then to be away from school at crucial times when they are trying to make decisions, without being in school with the support of advisors.”

“The ECD is fine. The RBD is the problem. It is actually inhumane to have Year 13 pupils needing to deal with offer/rejection and choosing Firm and Insurance during the A-level exam season.”

“The later deadlines since Covid have led to huge disruption to students in the exam period in May if they haven't had all their offers. Some students were responding to offers based on how they felt their exams had gone, with the flawed perception that they were not going well.”

10% of providers chose the December deadline as their preferred option; those that did mentioned volume of applications and additional selection processes as key drivers for this. UCAS will continue to work with providers to provide efficiencies where possible and are committed to a wider consultation to manage the increase in workload whilst ensuring fair and equal consideration. One example of this is the revised reference format, which has delivered benefits to both advisors and providers.

“The new UCAS reference format is very good and has made the system much more purposeful.”

“The new format has generally been well-received from within the University, as it allows relevant material about school context and the individual candidate’s specific needs to be easily identified.”

International

As might be expected there was a range of responses and commentary from international teachers and advisors, with just over 30% of responses coming from international colleagues; many reflecting the varied exam systems and term dates of individual countries. However, a strong preference emerged for maintaining the current dates, reflecting themes from domestic centres, although sometimes tempered with the particulars of application to HE in other countries.

“As an independent consultant working with a wide range of clients in the UK and overseas, I have personally found the extended post-COVID deadline to be a distinct advantage in giving applicants more time to make carefully considered decisions and applications.”

Student

Student engagement on the survey was encouraged through teacher and advisor promotion; advisors reflected that the modelling conducted by UCAS reflects student behaviour i.e. a deadline drives behaviour and the date itself is less important. Feedback from advisors on this also mentioned that for many students the UCAS application is a “one-off” occurrence and the deadline itself is a small part of the overall process and experience.

“The deadline is okay but the dates to hear back from providers add stress whilst trying to study for exams.”

“I think that it is beneficial that it is after the Christmas holidays as many schools have mock exams just before these and it is important that people have enough time to revise for this, not be rushing around also trying to juggle UCAS applications as these mocks also allow people to prove to teachers that their predicted grades can be moved up which can alter their university choices!”

Next steps

UCAS recognises that maintaining the current dates doesn’t provide solutions to the issues raised in the consultation, but it addresses concerns raised around timings, change management and the need to fully examine the impact this may have on applicant groups alongside the interaction with other proposed reforms and improvements. Responses to the consultation clearly demonstrate an appetite for a wider review of the admissions system to future proof it and meet the needs of all customers – UCAS will launch this in 2024, building on the comments and themes that have arisen from this and other forums.