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ADMISSIONS PROCESS REVIEW **RESPONSE FORM**

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.

Name	**Professor John Smart**
Job title	**Chair**
Organisation	**Council of University Heads of Pharmacy Schools (CUHOP)**

Are you replying as an individual or on behalf of your organisation?
Organisation

Please indicate which of the following categories applies to you/your organisation?	
Higher Education - University Higher Education - College Higher Education – Private provider School FE college Applicant or potential applicant Parent of an applicant or potential applicant Government body Non-Government body HE sector body Other (please state)	***Please enter one of these categories below:*** HE sector body

Application post-results: proposed system

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

(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 agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree	Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 3

(APR Consultation ref 23.6.2) Applying post-results will not necessarily have positive impacts on equality and diversity.	
1- strongly agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree	Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2

(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 agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree	Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2

(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 agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree	Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 1

(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 agree 2- agree	Enter number between 1 – 4 below: 2

3- disagree **4- strongly disagree**	

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **- Neither agree or disagree**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **2**

(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

Applicants from lower socio-economic backgrounds

The potential impact of the proposed changes on widening participation is a particular concern for schools of pharmacy. In particular, given that students from lower socio-economic groups tend to achieve lower grades at school than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, the increased focus on academic attainment inherent in the proposed system could be expected to *reduce* equality and diversity in admissions. Furthermore, widening access schemes often involve the use of contextual data and/ or a detailed screening process to determine which applicants are eligible for adjusted entry criteria or entry to enrol onto a widening access course, and so it may be that the shorter admissions window would disadvantage these applicants.

Applicants with qualifications other than A-levels and commonly accepted equivalents

Many applicants enter higher eduction with qualifications other than standard A- Levels (or the commonly accepted equivalents) and it may take time to interpret and assess these fairly.

International applicants

As well as applying with non-UK qualifications that take time to interpret, international students need time to organise their visa, and it is unlikely that the window for this in the proposed system is long enough.

Disabled applicants

Making adjustments to the selection process for disabled applicants would become more difficult in the time allowed.

Please enter any further comments about this section below

APR approach to admissions: a school of pharmacy view

Whilst we acknowledge that APR appears to offer the potential for a fairer approach to university admissions we feel that the proposed approach could be considered less fair both for specific groups of applicants (as described above) and in general due to the omission of an equal consideration deadline for Apply 1. Whilst Apply 2 has a proposed an equal consideration deadline in the third week of June, applicants to Apply 1 may apply at any time. The **absence of an equal consideration deadline** would make it difficult for institutions to treat applications consistently particularly in relation to any non-academic requirements.

It is acknowledged that APR would remove reliance on predicted grades (which can be unreliable) and would give applicants more time to make the most appropriate decisions regarding their applications. However it should be noted that for courses like pharmacy that lead to a profession, candidates have usually been working towards applying to a professional subject for a number of years, and therefore this group of applicants would not really benefit from the change to a post results applications system.

Pharmacy schools are looking for a **range of attributes beyond academic ability** that required for working in a healthcare profession. An important tool for assessing applicants on the full range of attributes and qualities required is the interview. Accommodating interviews within a 4-6 week window in July and August means interviews could not be run in the same number and therefore means that a very large proportion of applicants would be rejected without interview. It is therefore our view that a post-qualification application system would be highly likely to result in a **more mechanistic approach** to admissions, with an increased focus on academic attainment and less on professional suitability (likely fitness and ability to practise) which would be inappropriate. We would also suggest that by reducing the time available for institutions to consider and assess applicants on the full range of attributes beyond the academic ability demonstrated by attainment at A-level and equivalent assessments, APR would be inherently **unfair to applicants in general and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds in particular**.

Furthermore, the proposed system would not allow any **scope for assessing non-academic conditions** such as enhanced CRB and occupational health checks to be followed up after offers are made and before the beginning of the university term. This could lead to a number of students needing to be removed from courses during their first term.

Application post-results: widening participation

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

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **3**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **- Neither agree or disagree**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** ***2***

(APR Consultation ref 24.8.4) **Widening participation would be supported by more constructive and focussed advice and guidance.**	
1- strongly agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **- Neither agree or disagree**

(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?
Better careers guidance, early on The number of careers advisors is reducing, and it is important that applicants do have good access to advice and guidance. Regardless of whether APR is introduced, schools and colleges in the state sector

need far more support in delivering high quality careers advice to their students. Students need to be supported to consider their future careers, to select suitable subjects at A-level or equivalent, to make appropriate choices on applying to HE and to understand and perform well in the university selection process.

Appropriate and transparent application of contextual data and adjusted offers
Details of how contextual data will be used to determine adjusted entry criteria would need to be made explicit in order to encourage suitable and eligible applicants with lower grades than the minimum to apply to courses with higher grade requirements.

Please enter any further comments about this section below
Negative impact of APR on Widening Participation Measures to promote widening participation need to be made well before A-level and equivalent results are published. Moving to post-results applications is unlikely to have a major impact on the inequality of aspiration and will have no impact at all on inequality of attainment in schools and colleges. Also the absolute reliance on academic attainment for defining eligibility would require the introduction of separate admissions paths for WP students. While this would not be particularly difficult to manage, a separate route would add complexity to the process for students, could be associated with stigma and if some of those eligible to apply through the WP route chose not to do so it could lead to situations where two students from the same school and similar backgrounds applying through different pathways and therefore being considered on different terms.

Application post-results: Efficiency improvements

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

(APR Consultation ref 25.18.1) **A post-results system is an efficient system as fewer applications require processing by HEIs.**	
1- strongly agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **3**

(APR Consultation ref 25.18.2) **A more efficient streamlined process would enable HEIs to make financial savings.**	
1- strongly agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **3**

(APR Consultation ref 25.18.3) **A more streamlined process would make the process easier for applicants to navigate.**	
	Enter number between 1 – 4 below:

1- strongly agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**- Neither agree or disagree**

(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?

High concentration of applications to HEIs through Apply 2: a risk to the system

Although the volume of applications will be less than under the current system, we would anticipate that the reduced timeline for considering applications and the volume of largely high quality applications would mean that it would be very difficult to assess all applicants on the full range of attributes and qualities required for pharmacy. Members of staff involved in the admissions process, including those on interview panels often have other commitments over August – September such as annual leave, carer responsibilities, clinical duties, and using the summer break to conduct research which would limit their availability. This would almost certainly require using temporary staff during this period, with significant demands for training and an unacceptably high probability of errors. Realistically, universities would have to hire in specialist agency staff for these periods, who could expect to charge premium rates for their services, given that all universities would require their services at the same time.

Fewer interviews offered to applicants

In particular, Apply 2 would be a far more intensive period for HEI's in terms of staff resource. Whilst a post-results applications system could reduce staff requirements for most of the year, it is difficult to see how adequate staffing could be achieved during the intensive nine-week admissions period. As previously mentioned accommodating the range of assessment processes involved in selecting pharmacy students, including interviews in a short window during the summer would mean that interviews could not be run in the same number thus reducing the effectiveness of an initial assessment of applicants' 'fitness to practise'.

HEI's unable to offer the level and quality of advice to applicants sometimes required

There is enormous potential for making the admissions system easier for applicants to navigate, and many of the proposed changes would be very helpful. However, the very heavy workload imposed on universities during the nine-week window would preclude institutions from providing any detailed responses to enquiries from applicants. Applicants with unusual circumstances or unconventional educational backgrounds would be likely to face uncertainty as they would be unable to talk to staff at their chosen HEIs and the required predegree screening of applicants for healthcare professional courses will be less effective .

Difficulty dealing with A-level/ equivalent appeals

A major difficulty in the current admissions system is dealing with applicants who request re-marks of A-level and equivalent papers. As these take a period of days to weeks to be completed, we would be dealing with additional waves of applications during the Apply 2 period. This would make planning of numbers of interviews, confirmation of offers, etc. difficult. To allow the system to run at all efficiently, it would be necessary to restrict applications to students who had confirmed A-level grades at the Apply 2 deadline. Anyone requiring re-marks would have to use the Apply 3 period, by which time it would be unlikely that any places would remain.

Please enter any further comments about this section below

Application post-results: International and part-time students

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

(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 agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree	Enter number between 1 – 4 below: **2**

(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 agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree	Enter number between 1 – 4 below: **- Neither agree or disagree**

(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 agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree	Enter number between 1 – 4 below: **- Neither agree or disagree**
(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 agree 2- agree 3- disagree 4- strongly disagree	Enter number between 1 – 4 below: **3**

Please enter any further comments about this section below
If international applicants have to wait for their results before applying then this could cause potential issues with the visa process. Currently, the visa process is initiated as soon as a conditional offer is made at any point during the UCAS cycle. Under the proposed system this would need to be completed in less than nine weeks for all UK international students applying in Apply 2. We have concerns that completion of the visa process may not be achievable within the time frame allowed for Apply 2 in the 2015/16 proposals.

Application post-results: Examination, results and applications timetable

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

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **3**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **3**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **3**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **3**

(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?
Rather than looking at how the Scottish system may be adapted to be more in-line with the rest of the UK, we should also consider how systems in the rest of the UK could be adapted to be more in-line with the Scottish system. For example, an option would be to move the whole of the UK towards the Scottish system, where students could apply on the basis of their AS-level results. However, given that intention has been voiced to abolish the AS-level partly because it is acknowledged students develop and improve hugely over the two years of A - levels a move to select on grades attained at the end of the first year of a two year course could be seen counter to the aims of APR.

(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?
There are no obvious ways of accommodating the Northern Irish system with a post-results applications process.

Please enter any further comments about this section below
A-level examination timetables In terms of the window for processing A-level papers, it should be noted that there are already significant problems with the accuracy and reliability of A-level marking, as evident from the number of mistakes in recent years in content of papers and published grades, as well as the number of re-marks that are requested and result in alteration of grades. Increased time pressure can only be expected to increase the magnitude of these problems.

Application post-results: Proposed timetable changes

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

(APR Consultation ref 29.4.1) **An earliest start date of circa 8 October for first year students would not have a serious impact on the delivery of HE courses.**	
1- strongly agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- 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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **4**

(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.
We do not believe that delivering the number of interviews within the proposed time-scale is possible, both in terms of time and available resources, as well as applicant availability at short notice in what is traditionally a holiday period. In terms of alternatives, there could be a system of "intent to apply" before results come out, which would allow students to approach HEI's before the results are out and before the submission of their UCAS application. However this appears to be overly complicated, inefficient and counter to the intentions of a post results application process. Courses where the interview is an essential part of the process would need to employ more stringent screening processes to limit the number of applicants selected for interview. For example, pharmacy schools could develop a national admissions test similar to UKCAT for medicine and dentistry to filter out the applications at the first stage.

(APR Consultation ref 29.4.4) Please give any suggestions how to accommodate applications for courses requiring auditions or the submissions of portfolios.
N/A

Please enter any further comments about this section below
School and college timetables In terms of secondary schools and colleges ability to adapt to new timetables, we are sensitive to the fact that resources available in schools and colleges will be highly variable. Increasing pressure on the system will accentuate the disparities between the independent/selective and comprehensive state schools/colleges. **University timetables** In terms of university timetabling, the option of starting the HE academic year later in October would cause upheaval and mean reviewing timetabling, scheduling of teaching, and other dates for the academic year. Whilst the option of starting the HE year in January would solve many of the problems implicit in a post-results application system. However, this could not possibly be restricted to first-year students and would also put the UK out of alignment with HEIs throughout Europe and most of the rest of

the world thus impacting on international and EU recruitment. A start date of 8th October would be reasonable if this was required to allow a fairer and more streamlined admissions process.

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?

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **2**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **2**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **2**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **2**

Please enter any further comments about this section below
On the whole we welcome the proposals for 2013/14. Specifically we agree that clearing should be renamed 'apply 3' and modified to be a more managed equitable process, in order to be fair to all applicants and not simply those that manage to ring through first. We agree that the process could be improved by more systematic adherence to deadlines. However full adherence would require absolute clarity that decisions will not be changed on the grounds of appeals from applicants, their parents or schools. The entire HE sector must agree that (*i*) decisions are final and no appeal system exists, and (*ii*) no communication regarding any application will be entered into with anyone other than the applicant her/himself. We have some doubts and concerns as to how realistic this is.

The insurance choice

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	More complex than current process and has capacity for unfairness

		choice	
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

(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	5
Remove insurance choice	4
Enforce correct use of insurance choice	2
Make insurance choice optional for HEIs	3
Replace insurance choice with priority wait list option	1

Please enter any further comments about this section below

We find that the current insurance system confuses applicants, and is not always used properly. Reported misuses are:

- Applicants choose a course as an insurance with the same conditions as their firm choice (this is particularly true as MPharm degrees increasingly require the same high A-level and equivalent grades
- Applicants choose a course as their firm choice because the conditions are higher and not because it is the course they want to go to and it is their insurance choice, with lower conditions that is in fact their preference.

The misuse of the insurance system makes it difficult for institutions to manage offers and places, and clearly is failing to sever applicants if they are unable to understand it.

The ability to accept an offer as an insurance or back up option should an applicant not achieve the requirements of their first choice can be a useful facility for applicants, particularly those that are applying to highly selective courses. We therefore support the investigation into how to improve the

implementation of the insurance or back up choice both from the point of view of the applicant and the institution.

We suggest that the priority wait list be explored in more depth, perhaps in the first instance for professional courses to which applicants are likely to be applying to the same programme in a number of institutions. If this still proves to be too complex, as your initial research appears to show, we would suggest that measures, including better guidance for applicants, be taken to ensure that the insurance system is used properly. Applicants should not be able to put an offer with the same conditions as their firm choice as their insurance.

Timetable for reform

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

(APR Consultation ref 33.2.1) **2016 year of entry is a manageable start date for a system of applications post-results.**	
1- strongly agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **4**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **2**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **3**

(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 agree **2- agree** **3- disagree** **4- strongly disagree**	**Enter number between 1 – 4 below:** **2**

Please enter any further comments about this section below
We believe that to improve fairness for applicants, adaptation of the current system is more appropriate that any version of the proposed APR system. The 2014 deadline for other changes is likely to be achievable in most cases and are largely desirable. If the proposed changes for 2016 do not go ahead, some further modifications for 2014 would be useful. These include improving the flexibility of the UCAS entry profiles, live links to the UCAS database to allow HEI student/admissions records systems to automatically log withdrawals, changes, etc., and a clearer statement that HEIs will/should only communicate directly with applicants.

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

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

Or if you wish, print out a hard copy and return the document to:-

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