

Universities Admissions Centre (UAC)

SUBMISSION



Universities Admissions Centre

About us

The Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) Pty Ltd (UAC) was established in 1995 and is the largest tertiary admissions centre in Australia. Owned by universities in NSW and the ACT, our mission is to provide excellence in admissions services and promote equity of access to tertiary education. Central to that mission is a strong culture of servicing the needs of all our stakeholders, in particular our institutions and applicants.

UAC has a trusted and valued position in the higher education sector. Applicants, in particular Year 12 students, turn to UAC for unbiased and authoritative information about university admissions and courses and for an easy interface with which to apply. Institutions rely upon UAC services to handle the bulk of the admissions process, allowing them to focus on their core capabilities of

Executive summary

UAC is very supportive of the report of the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) on Improving the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions and welcomes the release of the consultation draft implementation plan.

UAC strongly endorses the plan's acknowledgment of the importance of this work to help students make better informed decisions about courses, which benefits not only the student, but also the sector, the government and the community. Like many in government and the sector, UAC is also hopeful that improved transparency will go at least some way towards addressing the rate of attrition from higher education and is keen to partner with Government and the sector on future initiatives in that area.

UAC believes that the use of the term "selection rank" can be promoted as a way forward, even in the short-term. Selection rank is transferrable across all types of applicants and all types of admissions. In the UAC system every applicant has a selection rank, and we have the capability to report that rank to applicants. The cut-off is the lowest selection rank (as opposed to the lowest ATAR) to gain entry into the course. There is an unfortunate tendency at the moment to use "ATAR" as an admissions catch-all, when in fact selection rank is more appropriate. ATAR is simply the base qualification for Year 12 applicants, and if we can educate the sector and the community about selection rank, this would greatly improve the transparency and understanding of higher education admissions. Selection rank is a holistic measure that encompasses all types of applicants and all types of admissions criteria, is a fairer and more equitable way of describing admissions, and UAC can progress the transparency of selection ranks to applicants in the short to medium term.

UAC broadly supports all six objectives of the plan, with specific endorsement of:

- UAC and other tertiary admissions centres developing and implementing improved reporting products.
- UAC and the other tertiary admissions centres working together to develop and implement a more streamlined approach to interstate applications.
- The provision of ATAR thresholds to prospective students that are inclusive and exclusive of bonus points. At the end of the day prospective students want to know what their own rank is and what rank is needed to gain entry.
- UAC is in favour of the development of a national admissions information platform and, while out of scope for the Implementation Working Group, UAC urges the Department of Education and Training to engage with UAC and other stakeholders when work begins on this project. While information is currently comparable within state borders, thanks to the work of UAC and the other admissions centres, there is a need for that to be extended so that information is comparable between states and across providers nationally. However, we note that the timeline of a pilot platform in December 2017 will only be achievable if other milestones around templates, terminology and thresholds have been achieved.
- UAC supports the reporting of the three subgroups of ATAR, ATAR plus other criteria and non ATAR for recent secondary students, and the inclusion of those with bonus points in the ATAR category, and also supports the reporting of offers made in all offer rounds. UAC also supports the reporting of the lowest ATAR to which an offer was made and the lowest selection rank (rather than lowest adjusted ATAR – see below) to which an offer was made.

Areas of concern include:

- The ambitious timelines proposed in the plan are at odds with UAC timelines for the 2018 admissions period. While we understand that the sector is to adopt a "best endeavours" approach for 2018 admissions, we are concerned with the objective of having agreed information sets that embody agreed terminology available on UAC's website by August 2017. UAC believes that this timeframe could be relaxed until October/November 2017 without detriment to prospective students who, even though they may have applied in August or September, still have time throughout October, November and indeed December to finalise their course preferences before results are released and the bulk of offers are made.
- The plan to use an initial set of common terms in August 2017 and then a final set of common terms in May 2018 may cause confusion if there are significant changes between the initial set and the final set. To maximise public confidence in this process there must be certainty around these terms from their first release.

Question 1

Is the proposed approach likely to be effective in increasing transparency and public understanding of how contemporary admissions to higher education work?

Yes, the consistency of terminology and information, and the reporting of additional information around selection processes will increase transparency. Public understanding will be improved if easy to understand terms are used and if the information is restricted to that which is necessary to students to make informed choices.

Question 2

How achievable are the proposed implementation timelines, including commitments to deliver a 'best endeavours' version of the proposed 2.5em puyear?ork?

Question 4

Do you have any comments on the proposed four broad groupings to describe the basis of admission for applicants to higher education?

- a. Recent secondary education
- b. Previous higher education study
- c. Previous vocational education and training (VET) study
- d. Work and life experience

While UAC is broadly supportive of these categories, the assigning of students to only one of these groups is problematic. Our institutions often have quite complex algorithms for the selection of students who have multiple qualifications and it may be difficult to determine precisely which of these categories best fits each applicant. For example, if a student is selected in the basis of 30% of their Year 12 rank, 30% of their TAFE Diploma, 30% of their year of Bachelor level study and 10% of their employment experience, which category would that applicant fall into?

Question 5

Do you agree that the proposed approach to Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) thresholds is reasonable (i.e. replacing the use of the terms “cut-off” and “clearly in” with functional terms describing the lowest ATAR made an offer in the relevant period?).

What issues or difficulties, if any, might this raise?

Question 6

Do the proposed “information sets” meet the need identified by the Higher Education Standards Panel for comparability of the information available from different providers about the requirements to be admitted to study at each institution and each course that they deliver?
