

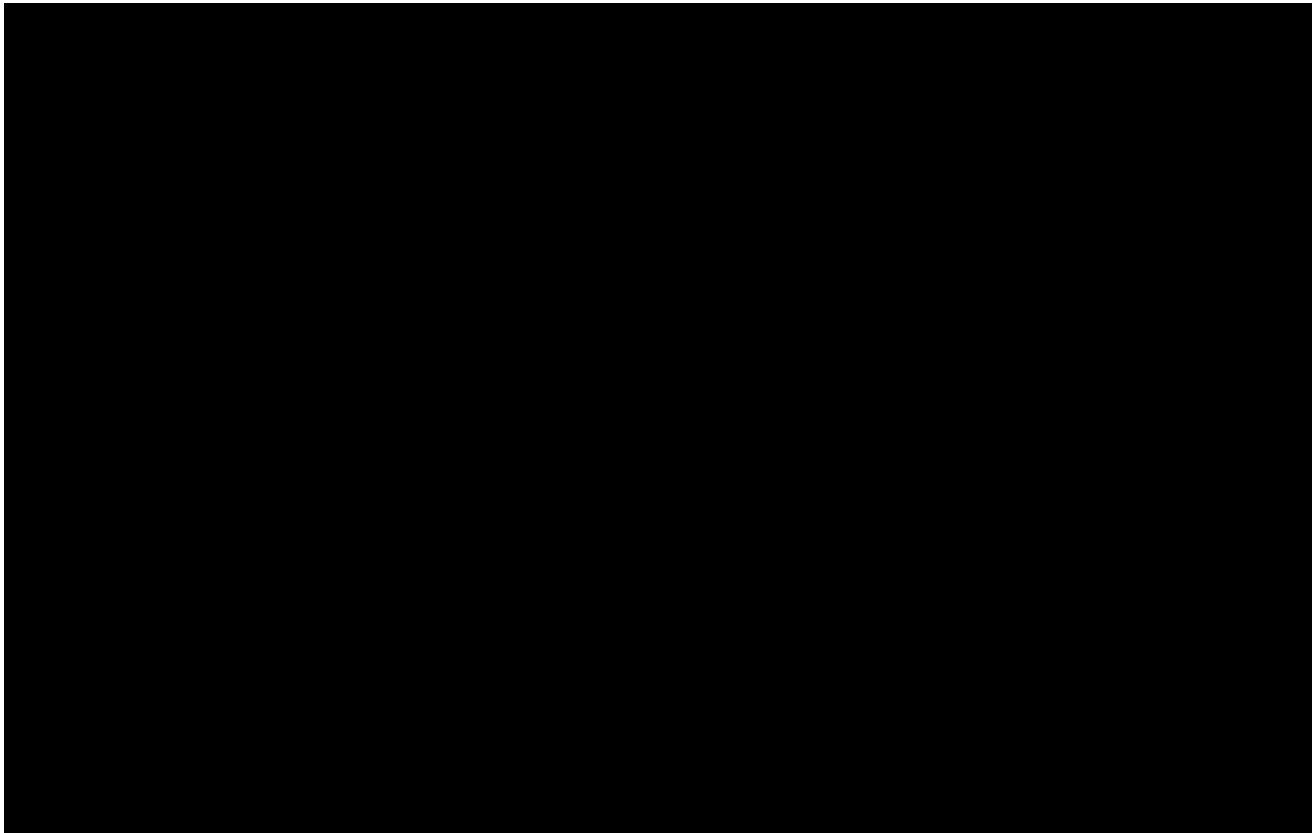
MC2 4.11 A National Admissions System for Universities and TAFE Colleges

Council agreed:

- a to establish a taskforce to pursue the following objectives by the specified dates:
 - common dates for close of main round applications and offers for applicants entering tertiary courses in 1996; a transparent and fair system of interstate equivalences, to be achieved by October 1995;
 - electronic linkages between tertiary institutions, admissions centres and other institutions to be in place by October 1995;
 - common data and coding structures for use on application forms;

and to report back on progress against the objectives to the next meeting of MCEETYA.
- b that the taskforce seek and report on appropriate linkages between these developments and the proposed Australian Credit Transfer Agency.
- c that the taskforce include representatives from the Commonwealth, all States/Territories and sectors.
- d to invite the Australian Conference of Heads of Tertiary Admissions Centres, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee and the National TAFE Chief Executives Committee to provide representatives to the taskforce.
- e to endorse the establishment of an electronic database on all tertiary courses and note that the Commonwealth has offered to take major carriage of this initiative.

Western Australia reserved its position on this item.





Ministerial Council on Education,
Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

SECOND MEETING

Alice Springs, 3-4 November 1994

2 4.11 A National Admissions System for Universities and TAFE Colleges

Relevant paper: Paper 2/4.11/1

References: New Item (Commonwealth)

Summary of paper

Paper 2/4.11/1 provided by the Commonwealth identifies key impediments to equitable entry to tertiary education institutions across Australia. As a first stage to overcoming these problems, it is proposed that MCEETYA establish a taskforce to pursue four objectives identified in the paper. It is also proposed that an electronic database on all tertiary courses be established, with the Commonwealth taking the major carriage of this initiative. These proposals, and the four objectives are in accordance with actions and principles endorsed by participants at the recent ACACA Conference on the use of Year 12 Data for Tertiary Entrance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

- a establish a taskforce to pursue the following objectives by the specified dates:
 - common dates for close of main round applications and offers for applicants entering tertiary courses in 1996;
 - a transparent and fair system of interstate equivalences, to be achieved by October 1995;
 - electronic linkages between tertiary institutions, admissions centres and other institutions to be in place by October 1995;
 - common data and coding structures for use on application forms;
 and to report back on progress against the objectives to the next meeting of MCEETYA.
- b agree that the taskforce seek and report on appropriate linkages between these developments and the proposed Australian Credit Transfer Agency.
- c agree that the taskforce include representatives ~~from~~ ^{for} the Commonwealth, all States/Territories and sectors. hrs
- d invite ACTAC, ACACA, the AVCC and the NTCC to provide representatives to the taskforce.
- e endorse the establishment of an electronic database on all tertiary courses and note that the Commonwealth has offered to take major carriage of this initiative.

COVERSHEET

1:33 PM 18 October 1994

MCEETYA file references for this item: MC/

Issue # 1

TITLE: A NATIONAL ADMISSIONS SYSTEM FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION

Preamble

The Commonwealth is seeking the development of a coordinated and cooperative method of matching applicants with places at tertiary education institutions across Australia. The proposed approach is based on the principles that all applicants for tertiary education should be able to make informed choices about courses and that students are not systematically discriminated against when applying to enter institutions in other States.

This approach does not envisage a central agency receiving applications, ranking applicants and allocating places for all tertiary institutions. Nor does it imply uniform selection processes across sectors and institutions. The approach should encompass a diversity of entry points and selection criteria across States/Territories and sectors. It is recognised that State education authorities and tertiary institutions must have authority over their admission policies and processes.

The system would complement the improved credit transfer arrangements being developed through, for example, the AVCC credit transfer project and the proposed Australian Credit Transfer Agency (ACTA). This agency will act as a broker between students and institutions in relation to credit transfer and recognition of prior learning (RPL). The Commonwealth hopes to embark on a phased implementation of ACTA from March 1995. In the longer term, it is envisaged that ACTA will also meet the credit transfer needs of other education/training sectors, including industry, and link into the admissions centres' databases.

The best use of resources implies the best match of students to places available throughout Australia in an increasingly diverse sector. Thus changes to the current system need to be developed as soon as possible.

Background

The inefficiencies of the present situation have been recognised for some time. In April 1992 the report *The Use of Year 12 Assessment Data for Higher Education*, commissioned by the Australian Education Council (AEC), pointed out that the "schools based educational activities of the States, and the higher education entry procedures which subsequently utilise the information about students from these activities, were not designed with cross-State compatibility in mind." The study showed that the consequence of this is that "while all would ascribe to the goal that Year 12 students should be able to pursue their applications for places in higher education at Australian locations which were of interest to them, wherever these might be, the very independence of the State systems provides unintended barriers to equitable entry activities."

The AEC in September 1992 "affirmed its interest in promoting and supporting procedures whereby applicants with appropriate Year 12 certification can confidently and knowledgeably seek equitable entry to higher education institutions across Australia, regardless of their State or Territory of origin." Since then considerable advances have been made in the collaboration between (Schools) Boards and Admission agencies. Progress towards improved cross-state coordination and collaboration between Boards and Admission Agencies is continuing at the level of data exchange, definition, timing and formatting.

While much of the original impetus for a national admissions system came from problems in the higher education sector, the need for greater coordination between higher education and TAFE admission has become apparent. Many potential students apply to both TAFE and higher education institutions and the differences in offer dates, information sources and application processes create similar inefficiencies to those created by interstate differences in timing and processes. The increased use of credit transfer between TAFE and higher education institutions is also creating the need for streamlined linkages between tertiary institutions and admissions centres.

On 10 - 11 October 1994 the New South Wales Board of Studies hosted a Conference on the use of Year 12 Assessment Data for Tertiary Entrance attended by relevant senior representatives of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities, the Australian Conference of Heads of Tertiary Admissions Centres, the National TAFE Chief Executives Committee, and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. The Conference agreed on targets for ensuring greater equity and consistency in determining entry to tertiary education institutions across all States and Territories and identified obstacles which may inhibit attainment of such targets. The conference reached general agreement and gave strong support to the principle of a cooperative national system for tertiary admissions as outlined in a paper presented by Professor Pargetter, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Monash University. This paper will be circulated as a supplementary paper prior to the meeting.

Issue

The Commonwealth recognises the commitment and planning underway and values the initiatives that have been undertaken. However, despite the fact that there is general agreement to the principles of cooperation and collaboration in the area of tertiary admission, the practical problems facing students, particularly those seeking interstate tertiary entrance, are likely to remain for some time without a major effort of will to change the situation. The problems have been identified as follows:

- insufficient information for students about Australia-wide opportunities in tertiary education. This factor inhibits students making the best possible choice about their educational future. A readily available electronic information system which includes current information about courses in both TAFE and universities, institutions, entry requirements and cut off scores in an accessible format would be of great assistance to students. The Commonwealth is willing to take major carriage of this initiative including funding for development. Development of the database would need to have regard to developments in the Job and Course Explorer database (JAC).

- variation in dates for Year 12 assessment and tertiary applications and offers across States/Territories and sectors. The different dates lead to a number of inefficiencies including:
 - students accepting places which they do not take up because they receive an offer at a later time in a different sector or State; and
 - students not receiving an offer they would otherwise have been entitled to because their tertiary entrance mark was not available in time for their application to be considered.

These inefficiencies would be overcome for the main round of offers each year by institutions and admissions centres having a common closing date for applications and offers for tertiary courses. This would not preclude preliminary rounds or other admission dates throughout the year.

- variation in the requirements for entry to tertiary courses across States/Territories and sectors. While this is not necessarily a problem, in practice the lack of awareness of these differences makes it difficult for students to assess their eligibility and opportunities for selection in courses in other States/Territories and sectors. It also makes it difficult for school students to select subjects to maximise opportunities for places in their preferred course across States/Territories and sectors. It is necessary to develop a transparent and fair system of interstate equivalences while maintaining the right of institutions to select students on the basis that is most appropriate to their courses.
- currently admission centres and institutions cannot easily access educational records of students in other States/Territories or systems. This creates delays for assessing eligibility and credit transfer. There is a need for tertiary institutions to be electronically linked with admissions centres and other institutions to allow for easy transfer of academic information on applicants. The Commonwealth is willing to consider funding for development of this system.
- TAFEs and higher education institutions across States/Territories do not have a coordinated application and offer process. Some commentators on the TAFE sector believe that aligning TAFE with university admissions would lead to some loss of the best students from TAFE to universities. However, a recent ANOP survey revealed that increased knowledge of TAFE courses leads to more favourable attitudes to TAFE as an alternative destination to tertiary education.
- variations in application forms across States/Territories and sectors. These differences mean that applicants have to fill out numerous forms and that there is no comprehensive picture of the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful applicants across the sectors. There is a need for agreement on common data and coding structures which could eventually lead to the development of a common core application to be used by all institutions.

The Commonwealth proposes that MCEETYA agree to the following recommendations to provide the basis for a practical first stage to overcome these problems. These initiatives are

in accordance with actions and principles which were strongly endorsed by participants at the ACACA conference. (See Attachment A.)

Recommendation:

It is recommended that

- Ministers establish a Task Force to pursue the following objectives by the specified dates :
 - common dates for close of main round applications and offers for applicants entering tertiary courses in 1996;
 - a transparent and fair system of interstate equivalences, to be achieved by October 1995;
 - electronic linkages between tertiary institutions, admissions centres and other institutions to be in place by October 1995;
 - common data and coding structures for use on application forms,

and to report back on progress against the objectives to the next meeting of MCEETYA.

- Ministers agree that the Task Force seek and report on appropriate linkages between these developments and the proposed Australian Credit Transfer Agency.
- Ministers agree that the Task Force include representatives from the Commonwealth, all States/Territories and sectors.
- Ministers invite ACTAC, ACACA, the AVCC and the NTCC to provide representatives to the Task Force.
- Ministers endorse the establishment of an electronic database on all tertiary courses and note that the Commonwealth has offered to take major carriage of this initiative.

DRAFT

AGREEMENT OF ACACA CONFERENCE OCTOBER 1994

The conference is planning to report to MCEETYA at its first meeting in 1995.

Actions strongly supported.

The conference give in principle endorsement to the general directions of the Pargetter paper.

The conference ask MCEETYA to endorse the principles of a cooperative national system (not centre) for tertiary admissions as outlined in the Pargetter paper.

The conference ask MCEETYA to encourage the use of a multi-staged selection process for tertiary admissions.

The conference ask MCEETYA to endorse and facilitate the establishment of a working party to coordinate critical dates.

The conference ask MCEETYA to endorse the principle of each State and Territory moving to a TER of its own design (where this has not occurred) and to restructure their own selection processes in terms of use of this rank and/or other factors which may be course or institution specific.

Where not already in place MCEETYA be asked to encourage local admissions centres and relevant TAFE authorities to coordinate TAFE and higher education application processes.

The conference expresses a preference for starting in 1996.

The common offer date for universities to be set at January 22/24 1997.

Tertiary admissions centres to identify common data elements and coding structures for use on application forms.

The conference agrees that, on an interim basis, an age cohort method for TER interstate comparisons should be adopted nation wide.

AVCC and NTCC be asked to consider adjustments to academic year to facilitate common dates and effective admissions system across the country.

MCEETYA be asked to provide enhanced information to students about options available to them nationally; a sustained program nationally funded.

**Second MCEETYA Meeting
Alice Springs, 3-4 November 1994
Supplementary Paper for Agenda Item 4.11**

(This paper has been distributed separately to all Ministers and CEOs. A summary paper will be included in the meeting papers which should be sufficient as material needed to bring to the meeting.)

**USE OF YEAR 12 ASSESSMENT DATA
FOR TERTIARY ENTRANCE**

SYDNEY CONFERENCE

10 & 11 OCTOBER, 1994

Towards a National Tertiary Admissions System

**Robert Pargetter
Monash University
Clayton, Victoria**

Towards a National Tertiary Admissions System

1) Background and Motivation

To assess a proposal requires some appreciation of the background to that proposal and of motivations for it. To discuss tertiary selection in a national context and to make proposals for change arises out of five not unrelated considerations.

The first is the political imperative perhaps best encapsulated by the Australian Education Council when they resolved to "endorse a conference of relevant senior representatives of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA), the Australian Conference of Heads of Tertiary Admissions Centres (ACHTAC), the National TAFE Chief Executives Committee (NTCC) and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) to consider and plan cooperative action to resolve any unnecessary and potentially unproductive differences in the collecting, reporting and processing of assessment data, and to consider the value and feasibility of any possible mechanisms for achieving a common reference system in relation to the transition of students from secondary education to TAFE and university study."

It is apparent that a general direction in the development nationally of the education system has been towards use of outcomes from a "final year at school" for selection to the full range of tertiary education. Another general direction has been the development of pathways to allow movement across the various sectors of the tertiary area. The resolution by the AEC is predicated on the continuation of these kinds of general movement, but goes further. It aims to facilitate equitable access, through simple procedures, for any student completing Year 12 in any state or territory, to tertiary institutions in any state or territory. Simply put it calls for a major rethink of the way in which applications by interstate and territory applicants are managed in Australia. It looks towards some common reference system that will ensure both equity and simplicity in application and process. Of course not all states and territories have yet adopted a single process for TAFE and Higher Education, so the resolution is certainly also predicated on uniformity in this regard.

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Thus the simple fact is that there is political pressure for a more unitary selection system, and the pragmatic reality is that all states and territories are in fact currently moving clearly and rapidly in the direction of similar systems of tertiary selection, largely based on the outcome of the evaluation of a student's final year at school.

If there was any remaining doubt about this political interpretation, it has been put to rest by the Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Mr Simon Crean. In recent statements he has consistently supported the development of a National Tertiary Admissions Centre or a National Tertiary Admissions System with its intended delivery of simpler and more equitable processes to allow students to move across state and territory boundaries into tertiary institutions.

A second consideration in the background and motivation for this proposal, one with both educational and political elements, is the need to assist in the development of a culture where students seriously consider tertiary education "away from home", including away from one's own home state or territory. This is not, of course, completely new. Rural students and students who do not live in capital cities, have traditionally often made such moves, though the development of a unified national system of universities has somewhat reduced this need. But compared to other countries, particularly the UK and sections of the US college system, the numbers are small and the culture to move is not strong. Many have seen educational advantage in such movement, and its corresponding impact on student campus life. The costs to the student are higher, but the advantages for many are seen to be significant. To this educational advantage there is now a political one. With great attention now being given to the allocation of higher education resources, and their distribution across state and regional boundaries, one element in the response to uneven distribution, perhaps alongside some re-allocation of places, is the movement of students to locations where the human and physical infrastructures have been developed. But to be effective this requires a more national approach to tertiary selection.

A third consideration is that it is likely that the unified national system may become less homogenous in the nature of its institutions and the range of its programs and special areas of expertise. If there is a diversification between the institutions in their approaches to higher education, to unique programs, to a more rational and limited range of programs at each institution, then students will need to be able to move to the institution where the course they want is offered. Yet this is only achievable if we can handle interstate-and-territory movement of students in an equitable way and by a simple and manageable process.

A fourth consideration is the pragmatics of the way in which interstate applications are currently handled by state and territory admissions centres. The number of such applications are still comparatively small but are growing. There is an increasing need to handle such applications well. Much effort is made to do this, but it is acknowledged that there are difficulties in dealing with those applications in a way that does not disadvantage the student either with the interstate application or with a concurrent home-state application. There is also a measure of approximation in judging equivalencies that is not to the applicant's advantage.

A fifth, and at this time final, consideration is the view that even if no new initiatives are taken to promote interstate and territory movement of students, the numbers will continue to increase, and perhaps dramatically increase. Students are starting to look at interstate and territory options, course and institutional specialisation is increasing, changes in approaches to the graduate-undergraduate divide are taking place. One example is movement by Flinders, Sydney and Queensland universities to offer medicine for graduate intake only. This could well have a very significant impact on applications for medical course across state and territory borders.

These considerations are not exhaustive, and of course are closely related to each other. But enough has been said to set the context for our discussion. There is a need for a system of tertiary selection that allows students to apply for institutions across state and territory boundaries, that ensure they are treated equitably in their applications and that they are not disadvantaged in any other application by having

made an interstate application, and also to ensure that the whole process is simple and open so that a culture of national application is encouraged and that students do not believe they are prevented by the process.

2) What is wrong with the present system?

The present system is that a student may make an interstate-or-territory application and that this application is treated equally alongside all other applications by the state or territory's admissions centre. The data used is based on the students' final school results, normally wholly or substantially Year 12 assessment data.

What is wrong with this sort of approach?

In the end I want to say "not much", but the situation is more nightmarish once the rest of the details are added. The significance of the details is that they do raise the question as to how a state or territory admission centre can give interstate applicants truly equitable consideration, how they can prevent a student from being disadvantaged in other applications, and how they can give applicants confidence in all the processes that are being used.

Let me mention some of these details:

- a) Results used are school results. Sometimes these results come directly from School Boards (eg Boards of Studies), sometimes from that State's Admissions Centre. Sometimes they come after calculation of an overall rank, sometimes in the form of aggregates of scales scores from which a notional "rank" is then determined, sometimes both are supplied.
- b) Consider the aggregates of scaled scores. Is the scaling comparable and is the input data for the home state scaling comparable? Can scaled results be considered "equivalent to" scaled results in another state, and if not can an adjustment be made and in fact is an adjustment made?

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- c) Suppose a rank comes. Is it a rank from the School Board or is it a rank from the home state or territory's admissions centre? Is the rank based only on the students' end-of-school results? Over how many years, and with what penalty for repeats, or for time taken? What factors other than end-of-school results enter into the rank? What about vocational studies? What about university studies taken at school?
- d) What is the cohort for the rank, that is what is the population that the student is ranked in?
- e) What is the fineness of scale for subject results, and for ranks? Where does "rounding-off" occur?
- f) On what is the ranking based? On how many subject areas or studies? Are there any compulsory studies or are there spread of discipline areas requirements? Are there bonuses for extra subjects or designated subjects? Are there restrictions on combinations - how many LOTEs, how many maths? What penalties exist?
- g) Irrespective of the rank, does the student satisfy minimum tertiary entrance requirements in the relevant state or territory? (A recent example has a student on the 92nd percentile rank not satisfying another state's minimum entrance requirement.)
- h) Does the student have results or an academic profile additional to the end-of-school results? How do such results impact on rank, or how are they given reasonable consideration in the selection process? Does the student have results instead of the home state's normal end of school results (eg IB, vocational college)? How do such students receive reasonable consideration in the selection process?

- j) Once all these matters are known, how will the Admissions Centre evaluate an interstate applicant? Does it just provide the information to the course selection officer? Does it calculate a notional rank to give correspondence to in-state students? How is this done, does it include bonuses and penalties, how does it scale or adjust?

This list is of course just the beginning. But the issues raised here raise two questions. First the theoretical plausibility of being able to give interstate applicants due and equitable consideration. Can it really be done, given the great diversity in the current mix of systems across our states and territories? Secondly with such a diversity the student is in an impossible position with respect to choosing a rational strategy to be in a strong position for selection over a number of states and territories. For example, deciding on numbers of subjects, mix and choice of subjects, and distribution of effort over subjects can lead to a very good strategy for one state but a very bad strategy for another.

But there is another list of details of a pragmatic kind that perhaps are even more troublesome.

- k) Are the relevant results and information available to allow the timely consideration of the student for a first round offer in the course for which the student has applied?
- l) Has the student been able to change preferences, including interstate preferences, in the light of the final end-of-school results?
- m) Does the student have to make a decision concerning any first round offer that is prejudicial with respect to any other possible first round offer; or disadvantage the student in any way.
- n) Do requirements concerning pre-requisites, or information allowing the assessment of pre-requisites, disadvantage the selection of interstate students.

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- o) Do requirements concerning attendance for interviews significantly disadvantage the selection of interstate students.
- p) Is an instate applicant disadvantaged with respect to second or later round offers of places by the practices by state or territory admission centres or by tertiary institutions.

This list now seems overwhelming. We are probably amazed that any interstate student gets chosen for anything. Of course they do. Admissions Centres and institutions go out of their way to give interstate applicants every consideration. The question that remains though is that surely we can do better and make the lives of instate applicants, admission centres and tertiary institutions easier, and the system better.

3) Two approaches

There seem to be two ways to go.

We could make tertiary selection a national process, or we can address many of the difficulties faced within the present state-and-territory based process.

I wish to urge the latter, and at the same time suggest that while this would not lead to a national tertiary admission centre, it could lead to a national tertiary admission system.

A National Tertiary Admissions Centre suggests:

- a single national agency to monitor and direct the tertiary selection process;
- a single application form covering universities and TAFEs nationwide;
- a single first-round (at least) offer in a preferential multi-round system.

Laudatory as such an achievement might be, I think realistic and pragmatic considerations make achieving such a National Centre extremely difficult.

Put aside the horrors of a new overlaying Federal bureaucracy across what is a relatively lean and effective network of state and territory admissions centres. What is more daunting is that to have a National Centre, virtually all of the problems of the existing system listed earlier would need to be solved, and all solved at once. Overcoming such problems would seem to be a precondition for establishing a National Centre.

If this is not daunting enough, I think there may need to be even more immediate national changes to make a National Centre credible

- there would need to be a completion of the integration of selection for the university and TAFE sectors;
- there would need to be an immediate acceptance of national curriculum frameworks to underpin secondary education, and for a fairly significant amount of detail in that framework for the higher secondary level;
- there would need to be cross state comparison of state and territory cohorts given the very great differences in those cohorts and the educational systems: perhaps a National GAT - a national general aptitude test to help equate different ranking systems.

I do not believe that all of those are particularly achievable in the short-term, putting aside the issue of whether they should be achieved.

If there are still some who cling to the goal of a National Admissions Centre, let me mention two other considerations.

State systems are already very complex. They allow preferences, change of preference, varieties of selection philosophies for courses at different institutions, campus preferences for the same course at an institution. These features are good for students and good for institutions. But they are complex, difficult to explain, and rely on a good deal of local knowledge. Imagine the increased complexity of a national

application. A new order of magnitude in complexity, and a complexity to be mastered by all applicants.

Secondly, one very positive feature of the existing system at its best is the close relationship between the admission centre and its main users, both tertiary institutions and secondary schools in the particular state or territory. A national system will lose these close connections, and correspondingly run the risk of a less tailored service to the main users. While it is an objective to develop a better selection processes for interstate applicants it cannot be overlooked that the large majority of students in the foreseeable future will continue to choose locally. We must service this larger majority in the maximally efficient way, while catering better for the small but hopefully growing minority of interstate applicants.

Turn now to the alternative approach, a National Admissions System. Characterise this by the following features:

- maintenance of autonomous state-and-territory-based admissions centres, hence having multiple applications and multiple first round offers
- an immediate move to address the problems listed above for dealing with interstate applicants, according to a timetable agreed to by state and federal authorities, with progress monitored by the Australian Education Council through a small secretariat.
- Continuation of the dialogue and the development of further operational agreements between Admissions Centres and increase formal operational arrangements with Boards of Studies to allow implementation of agreements, solving the problems and facilitating the processing of interstate-and-territory applications.

Given the difficulties with the National Centre approach, and the apparent attractiveness of the alternative system approach, surely the choice is clear. But this should not lead to relief and relaxation. There are some serious concerns that must

be addressed with urgency for this approach to have a chance for future success. Let me present three:

- (i) There are some of the issues, most of which were listed earlier, that would need immediate attention in order to begin to achieve the aims of a national system. To achieve them requires determination by State, Territory and Federal Governments, and the co-operation of the State and Territory School Boards, Admissions Centres and TAFE bodies. These issues include
- integration of TAFE and Higher Education into a single State or Territory system of tertiary admission where this has not already occurred;
 - co-ordination of dates for availability of school results, first round offers, acceptance of offers, and so on and so forth;
 - agreement by each state to move to a Tertiary Entrance Rank (of their own design) where this has not occurred, and to restructure their own selection processes in terms of use of this rank and other factors which may be course or institutional specific;
 - make some adjustment to the formal features of the various TERS to allow ranks to be more comparable across the states and territories, such as determination of the student cohort, the degree of fineness of the grade scales and TERS.
 - agreement by School Boards or Admissions Centres to provide with more refinement the data needed to other state and territory admission centres to allow them to determine as accurately as possible notional TERS for the interstate-or-territory applicants.
- (ii) There would need to be quick resolution of present tension in some states concerning the nature of a TER and its acceptance by the higher education and the occupational training sectors. It seems clear that there will be a significant number of vocational units available in the senior secondary curriculum, and that a growing number of students should and will take these units. They

cannot be asked to do a "heavier than normal" load of units in order to achieve a TER. We need institutions, particularly universities, to be generous about the basis of the TER with additional matters taken into account in selection by such requirements as pre-requisites and performance in pre-requisite subjects, while giving increased quality emphasis on their high out-put standards. To the extent that we have threats of university entrance exams, we are working in complete opposition of a real national admissions system.

- (iii) There needs to be a clear reply to the contention that the outlined system, a modification and coordination of the state and territory selection arrangements, is theoretically flawed and doomed to fail. It could be argued that unless we achieve a national curriculum and a national GAT, together with all the details needed for a national single TER, cross state and territory comparisons can never be achieved with sufficient degree of accuracy, even given that we may solve the pragmatic and other problems already identified as issues that must be immediately addressed. Hence the second approach is flawed and so, despite its horrors, we should accept the need for a National Admissions Centre if we really wish to have appropriate national arrangements for secondary to tertiary transition.

I think this reasoning is flawed. It rests on two unsustainable assumptions: one about the precision of the TER for each state or territory; the other about the use of the TER in the selection process in each state or territory. I will discuss these assumptions, and urge an alternative understanding of these matters.

4) Accuracy and Precision in Ranks and Selection

Take some particular state or territory.

Agree that the end-of-school subjects or studies are reasonably sophisticated in their curriculum aims and specifications in terms of skills and outcomes. Given our ability to measure these skills and outcomes, given the constraints under which we work,

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given the difficulty of moderating school and externally based assessment, given the difficulty of determining genuine authenticity, it would be a brave person that thought the possible error in each study's grade would not be at least 10%.

These results are then put through a complex system of scaling and calculation of a TER to produce a percentile rank. I find it very difficult to accept that this calculated rank would not have a reasonably likely error factor of at least $\pm 2\%$. I actually think that I am being extremely optimistic here.

Now there are three other factors linking the calculated rank with selection for a course

- a) How reliable is the calculated rank as an estimate of the real rank of the student in the cohort. Given my understanding of the scaling processes and the algorithms which calculate the rank in two states, I believe one must acknowledge a correlation much less than one, with the additional feature that the correlation decreases as the rank lowers.
- b) How good a correlation would there be between either the perfect or the calculated rank and success in the tertiary course? I again believe there must be acknowledgment that the correlation is much less than one, will vary between courses or programs, and will vary further as the cut-off rank decreases.
- c) Are there not factors not reflected in the rank which have good correlation with performance in the tertiary course? Here again most courses site considerations like performance in pre-requisite subjects and performance in practical areas as vital, while information about work experience, motivation and implication, personal qualities, issues relating to circumstances of disadvantage or background, and a detailed academic profile are extremely helpful in supplementing the TER in the selection process to give more valid selection criteria, ie with better correlation with success in the course. It may

be that a TER can be defined which incorporates more than just end-of-school results or it may be that these factors are considered at the institutional level or course level, or it may be a mixture of both. Generally though rank is not the whole story.

Putting all this together. A final ranking of applicants for selection should not just be determined by a TER. The TER has an error factor, and is not the whole story for selection anyway. The response should be then to see selection as a two-stage process. Some selection, perhaps up to 85%, can be selected on the basis of TER alone, but the last part of selection should involve consideration of more than the TER. This gives some method of responding to the error in the TER, its correlation with course success, and the importance of other factors.

The sizes of the two parts of the selection cohort should vary according to views about special factors in course success, and also to the reliability of a TER at the cut-off point for a course. In some cases the second part could be 100%, where an index of selection criteria is used as in the case of many TAFE courses.

It should be stressed that middle band selection, selection in the area where TER is not the sole ranking criteria, should not be seen as unstructured, inequitable, unquantified and subjective. There is institutional responsibility to ensure that this selection process is carried out according to agreed criteria and policy, with weightings for each specified criterion.

Now if this is a reasonable approach to selection, given the imprecision of TERs, and perhaps the only approach that is reasonable, it seems easily extendable to cover interstate applicants. If a notional TER is calculated, it will have an imprecision in equivalence to the home TER. The more work we do to address the problems we have discussed above, the less the imprecision, but an imprecision remains. But TERs are always imprecise and the worse case scenario is that a notional TER will have a slightly greater error than a normally calculated TER for that state or territory.

Hence if we widen slightly the middle band for interstate applicants, and make provision for consideration of the full range of middle band factors for interstate applicants, interstate applicants seem to be able to be reasonably handled within the selection process that seems appropriate for home state or territory applicants.

I conclude that there is no in principle problem with handling interstate applicants in a national system of tertiary admission based on a co-ordinated system of state and territory admissions centres.

5) The Strategy in Summary

If the objective is to have a national system of tertiary selection, particularly for selection based primarily on Year 12 assessment data, the best strategy seems to be to work within the existing framework of the selection procedures of the network of state and territory admissions centres.

It requires that some of these centres, with the support of the government, school boards, universities and TAFEs within that state or territory, move as many centres have already done to integrate selection for university and TAFEs, and to move to a single tertiary entrance rank for that state or territory. This will require, as other centres already can attest, some delicacy and balance in negotiating the specification of the TER, and determination of the role it plays in selection. The TER must not place undue requirements on students who take vocational or TAFE units within their Year 12 program, and at the same time must select adequately for academic programs. TAFE could use an index of selection criteria, in which the TER is but one factor, and the universities could use pre-requisites with perhaps specified grade requirements, to provide a way forward for both sectors who have reservations about a single TER based on Year 12 assessment data for a very broad higher secondary program.

Delicacy and balance may solve some opposition to the introduction and use of TERs, but it may be difficult to achieve TERs in all states and territories in the short term, given current ideological positions. While use nationally of TERs clearly aids the

equity and simplicity objectives, alternative procedures could be used provided that they appropriately place the interstate-and-territory applicants in the ranking for selection in a manner that did not disadvantage any applicant. In a non-TER arrangement this will involve obtaining data far more extensive than that required to determine a notional TER.

The singly most important element of the strategy is to bring about the coordination of data for Year 12 results, first round offers and other key selection and admissions occurrences. State and territory Admissions Centres and Boards of Studies cannot achieve this alone. The will to make it happen will require keen and active support from State and Federal governments, perhaps even to the extent of legislation, to ensure that the practicalities of a national system of tertiary admission are achieved. All entities and bodies involved must work to achieve the necessary arrangements, and good will probably will deliver the objectives. It is also important that all elements are brought into line at the same time. It would take key decisions now by the Australian Education Council to see arrangements in place for 1996.

Agreement is needed that an Admissions Centre will calculate a notional TER for that state or territory for each interstate applicant applying on the basis of year 12 assessment data, and that Centres will establish a table of equivalencies for pre-requisite studies for use for interstate applicants and will in fact process interstate applicants with respect to pre-requisite requirements according to that table. Such an examination of pre-requisites may lead to a more uniform approach to pre-requisites for similar courses across the nation. This is also likely to require the support of State and Federal governments.

Modification of the specification of the various TERs to achieve more uniformity, and further development of services performed by a State-or-Territory Admissions Centre for determining notional TERs for other states and territories, could be more progressively achieved; as could more uniform curriculum frameworks to assist in a national specification of pre-requisite equivalencies. Realistically these may be achieved over the next three to five years. Such moves increase the accuracy of the

calculation of national TERs, but in principle are not required to allow an effective national system to get under way. Notwithstanding this, quick agreement about required subjects for the TER and specification of the TER cohort would greatly increase the accuracy of notional TER calculation and simplify the arrangements required. There should also be an immediate move to establish agreement about minimum entrance requirements with the tertiary sector.

Ideally, if there could be complete agreement across all Admissions Centres concerning cohort and TER specification may well lead to the reasonable acceptance of a TER from one state or territory as the notional TER for another.

The final piece in the strategy is to move nationally to a two-stage selection process. Each course could specify a percentage of places (somewhere between 0-85%) which will be determined by TER alone, including notional TERs for interstate applicants, plus satisfaction of pre-requisite requirements. Institutions, perhaps with the assistance of their Admissions Centre, would then select from "middle-band" applicants, the remaining 100-15%, using some specified index of selection criteria for that course. Minimally this should include consideration of the full academic profile of the applicant, particularly with respect to performance in pre-requisite subjects or studies, and special consideration due to circumstances of disadvantage. However, the criteria listed in the index could be far more extensive than this, covering folios, auditions, interviews, school profiles or reports, tests, work experience and other admission criteria. This second stage of selection acknowledges both the limited accuracy and predictive effectiveness of any TER, and also mitigates against any inequities that may have been introduced in calculation of notional TERs. A significantly expanded group of applicants should be considered in filling the second stage places, perhaps about twice the number that would have been considered if those places were determined by TER alone. Of course, this is the description of the selection of the "school leaver" component of the course intake, to be paralleled by arrangements for non-school leavers.

This strategy is not without flaws. It is driven by the combined imperative that we

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must meet the "national approach" requirement, and that the most obvious alternative is unacceptable. There may of course be other alternatives, but it must be clear that they are able to measure up against the requirements for a national approach for tertiary selection. I am sure there will be much tinkering with the suggested strategy. But it is a beginning. There is much work to be done according to this strategy, but it is shared work, and it is staged and manageable.

In all, it is a modest proposal.

Robert Pargetter
Monash University

RJP:jac
6 October 1994

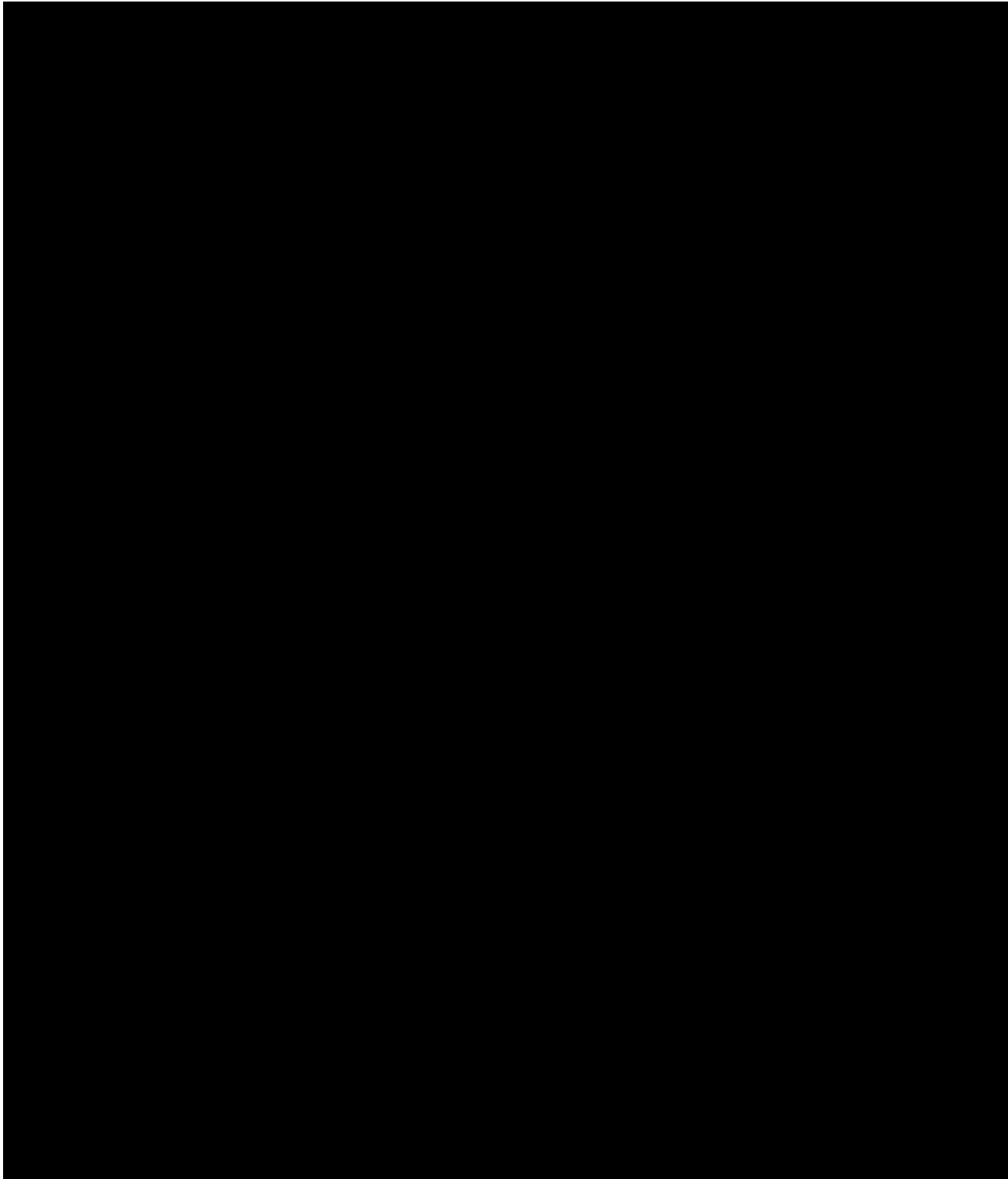


MC3 4.9.1 Report from the Taskforce on a National Tertiary Admissions System

Council:

- a agreed to the implementation of the Australian Tertiary Admissions System built around the continuing operation of existing tertiary admission systems;
- b agreed to the implementation of the following common dates:
 - i the last working day in September as the date by which receipt of a main round application would guarantee its processing;
 - ii for 1996 the latest date for main round offers to be 24 January and the last date for responding to main round offers no earlier than 27 January, with admission centres in later years endeavouring to allow a longer gap between the last day of publications of main round offers and the latest day for responding to offers, by moving forward the date of publication of main round offers;
- c agreed to a target of the first working day of January as the latest date for release of Year 12 results to students;
- d agreed that there should be a single national approach to the calculation of tertiary entrance rank equivalences across States to be available for tertiary intakes in 1997;
- e agreed to the use of the "home state rule" for interstate applicants, and to the use of the home state university entrance rank (where more than one ranking is awarded) for interstate applicants to universities;
- f supported the progressive extension of the use of electronic networking for communication between admissions centres and institutions, both universities and TAFEs;
- g endorsed the collection of a core set of data, with common data definitions, covering demographics and previous education experience, to be handled by the heads of tertiary admission centres;
- h agreed to the continuation of the Task Force, with a view to:

- i investigating the benefits of and options for further integration of the admission practices of the vocational education sector with the Australian Tertiary Admission System;
- ii achieving the design of a research project that will lead to a methodology for calculation of interstate tertiary entrance rank equivalences;
- iii undertaking further work on the legal underpinnings of equivalence determinations, and on the equality of treatment for interstate applicants seeking admission without a tertiary entrance rank, through other entry points; and
- iv reporting to MCEETYA on progress toward common data and coding structures.





Ministerial Council on Education,
Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

THIRD MEETING

Canberra, 26 May 1995

Item 4.9 National Systems and Databases on Courses and Occupations

4.9.1 Report from the Taskforce on a National Tertiary Admissions System

Relevant paper: Paper 3/4.9.1/1

References: MCEETYA Minutes 2/4.11

Summary of Paper

In this paper the Taskforce reports on substantial fulfilment of the terms of reference set before it by the previous meeting of MCEETYA and requests endorsement of decisions made in relation to those objectives. In addition, the Taskforce outlines further work necessary to ensure the widest possible scope for the Australian Tertiary Admissions System and seeks approval for continuation in order to undertake this additional dimension of responsibility.

Please note that a supplementary report for this item from the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA) on the October 1994 Conference on *'The Use of year 12 Assessment Data for Tertiary Education Entry'* is being circulated separately for information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

- (a) agrees to the implementation of the Australian Tertiary Admissions System built around the continuing operation of existing tertiary admission systems;
- (b) agrees to the implementation of the following common dates:
 - (i) the last working day in September as the date by which receipt of a main round application would guarantee its processing;
 - (ii) for 1996 the latest date for main round offers to be 24 January and the last date for responding to main round offers no earlier than 27 January, with admission centres in later years endeavouring to allow a longer gap between the last day of publications of main round offers and the latest day for responding to offers, by moving forward the date of publication of main round offers;
- (c) agrees to a target of the first working day of January as the latest date for release of Year 12 results to students;
- (d) agrees that there should be a single national approach to the calculation of tertiary entrance rank equivalences across States to be available for tertiary intakes in 1997;
- (e) agrees to the use of the "home state rule" for interstate applicants, and to the use of the home state university entrance rank (where more than one ranking is awarded) for interstate applicants to universities;

COVERSHEET

2:58 PM 8 May 1995

MCEETYA file references for this item: MC/NTAS

Issue # 1

- (f) supports the progressive extension of the use of electronic networking for communication between admissions centres and institutions, both universities and TAFEs;
- (g) endorses the collection of a core set of data, with common data definitions, covering demographics and previous education experience, to be handled by the heads of tertiary admission centres;
- (h) agrees to the continuation of the Task Force, with a view to:
 - (i) investigating the benefits of and options for further integration of the admission practices of the vocational education sector with the Australian Tertiary Admission System;
 - (ii) achieving the design of a research project that will lead to a methodology for calculation of interstate tertiary entrance rank equivalences;
 - (iii) undertaking further work on the legal underpinnings of equivalence determinations, and on the equality of treatment for interstate applicants seeking admission without a tertiary entrance rank, through other entry points
 - (iv) reporting to MCEETYA on progress toward common data and coding structures.

REPORT OF THE MCEETYA TASK FORCE ON AN AUSTRALIAN TERTIARY ADMISSIONS SYSTEM

Terms of Reference

The Task Force was asked to report back against the terms of reference agreed by Ministers (with Western Australia reserving its position) at the November 1994 MCEETYA meeting. The Task Force was established to pursue the following objectives:

- common dates for close of main round applications and offers for applicants entering tertiary courses in 1996;
- a transparent and fair system of interstate equivalences, to be achieved by October 1995;
- electronic linkages between tertiary institutions, admissions centres and other institutions to be in place by October 1995;
- common data and coding structures for use on application forms,

and to report back on progress against the objectives to the next meeting of MCEETYA.

Ministers also agreed that the Task Force seek and report on appropriate linkages between these developments and the proposed Australian Credit Transfer Agency.

Membership

Membership comprises representatives of the Commonwealth and each State and Territory, with members being drawn from State government education and training departments, the National TAFE Chief Executives' Committee, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, the Australasian Conference of the Heads of Tertiary Admissions Centres and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA).

Introduction

The terms of reference provide a basis for overcoming practical problems facing students seeking interstate tertiary entrance. They are in accordance with actions and principles initiated by ACACA through the Australian Education Council and were strongly endorsed by participants at a conference on the use of Year 12 Assessment Data for Tertiary Entrance hosted by the New South Wales Board of Studies in October 1994. The report of that conference is being circulated separately as a supplementary paper to this agenda item.

The Task Force believes an Australian Tertiary Admissions System can be developed through increasing integration of the practices of the existing State Tertiary Admission Centres. The large number of stakeholders and the autonomy enjoyed by universities, State admission centres, the vocational education systems and other players, mean that inevitably different practices and timelines have developed in different sectors and in different States and Territories. Nevertheless there has already been considerable movement towards consistency and the Task Force has made very substantial progress toward achieving the objectives set by Ministers.

It should be noted that the focus of the Task Force has been individuals with tertiary entrance scores, mostly school leavers, who apply through the tertiary admission centres. The issue of coordination of the admission practices of the vocational education sector which are not already carried out through the tertiary admission centres has not been addressed at this stage.

The Task Force believes that, in order to establish the widest possible scope for the Australian Tertiary Admissions System, it is desirable to undertake further work on the benefits of and options for further integration of the admission practices of the vocational education sector, initially TAFE, especially where applicants are drawn from the same groups as universities. This work needs to recognise the characteristics of VET courses, clients and delivery systems (including competency based training).

The Task Force provided advice to the Commonwealth on the development of a national tertiary courses database. The Task Force views such a database as an important adjunct to the admissions system.

Progress against objectives

Common dates for close of main round applications and offers for applicants entering tertiary courses in 1996

The Task Force believes that uniformity in dates is not necessary for its own sake. The key issue is that applicants must have satisfactory access to tertiary places in all States; in particular, the reference dates must ensure that no main round offers from one State need to be accepted before all main round offers from other States are received. Nevertheless uniformity should be adopted wherever feasible in order to simplify the system for clients.

The major factor affecting the achievement of a common date for *main round applications* is the length of time required by the tertiary admission centres to process applications. All tertiary admission centres agreed that there should be a common date such that applications received up to this date would be guaranteed processing (this does not preclude admission centres accepting applications after this date). It was agreed that this date should be the last working day in September. All tertiary admission centres will be able to meet this date in 1995.

The Task Force identified factors affecting the achievement of common dates for *main round offers* as release of Year 12 results, starting dates for institutions, different methods of assessing ranking and time allowed for applicants to change preferences following receipt of their Year 12 results. The Task Force agreed that it would be possible to achieve a common set of boundaries for the key dates which would ensure that no main round offers from one State need be accepted before all main round offers from other States were received.

Taking these factors into consideration, tertiary admission centres agreed to 24 January 1996 as the latest date of publication of main round offers. The last date for responding to main round offers has been set for 1996 as no earlier than 27 January 1996. These dates allow students a minimum of three days in which to change their preferences after receiving their Year 12 results, provided that those results are released to students by 4 January 1996. The Task Force recommends that, in future, Year 12 results should be released to all students no later than the first working day of January. This target will be achieved in most States for 1996. As an interim measure, until this target is achieved in all States, tertiary admission centres will pursue special arrangements for individuals from States in which Year 12 results are released at a later date than the first working day in January.

The Task Force agreed that, in later years, admission centres should endeavour to allow a longer gap between the last day of publication of main round offers and the latest day of response to offers, by moving forward the latest date of publication of main round offers.

A transparent and fair system of interstate equivalences, to be achieved by October 1995

Under the current arrangements, the translation of a tertiary entrance score in one State to the scale applying in another State is determined by a set of interstate equivalence tables based on decisions of individual admission centres. Admissions centres in some states estimate tertiary entrance rankings using all people in the state at age, say, seventeen whether or not they are candidates for Year 12 assessment. Other states calculate their tertiary entrance rankings using Year 12 candidates only. While functional, this arrangement cannot be considered to constitute a national system.

The major perceived difficulty in establishing a national system of interstate equivalences is that the Year 12 candidates represent a different proportion of the relevant age cohorts in each State. For example, Year 12 retention ranges from close to 100 per cent in the ACT to around 60 per cent in Tasmania. This raises the possibility that the quality of candidates, particularly at the bottom of the distribution, varies across States and has the implication that neither an age cohort ranking of candidates (which assumes that candidates come from the top of the ability distribution within States) nor a candidature ranking of candidates provides a satisfactory basis for obtaining interstate equivalences.

A sub-group of the Task Force suggested a method which combines aspects of both the age cohort and candidature methodologies. While this method addresses some of the difficulties of using solely the age cohort or candidature methodologies, consultations indicated that further work is required to achieve a transparent and fair system. However, the advice of the sub-group persuaded the Task Force of the desirability of achieving a single, national set of equivalences.

Consequently, the Task Force recommends that further work needs to be done to design a research project that will lead to a methodology for establishing interstate equivalences which can be externally validated, at least within the constraints provided by the States' school systems and admission procedures. The objective would be to develop the methodology to be available for applicants entering institutions in 1997. Finalisation of this issue can proceed independently of other elements of the Australian Tertiary Admissions System.

In the interim, the tertiary admissions centres will endeavour to ensure as much consistency as possible and have been asked, as a matter of urgency, to report on whether a consistent set of equivalences is possible for the top 20 per cent of the age cohort (in which the majority of interstate applicants fall).

The Task Force also agreed to recommend the adoption of:

- the "home state rule", by which an individual's ranking as awarded in his/her own State, is used as the ranking for interstate applications. This rule is required because different States have different requirements for tertiary ranking (eg 'best five' or 'English must be included') This does not over-ride any subject prerequisites that may be required by individual institutions
- the use of the rank used for entrance into home state universities, for States in which more than one ranking is derived, as the ranking to be used for interstate applications to universities. This approach is needed because some States calculate more than one ranking for different purposes. In those States where there is more than one rank for university entrance, one of those ranks will be designated for interstate purposes.

The Task Force also believes that there would be merit in undertaking further work on the legal underpinning of equivalence determinations, and on the equality of treatment for interstate applicants seeking admissions without a tertiary entrance rank or on the basis of entry interview or other selection criteria.

Electronic linkages between tertiary institutions, admissions centres and other institutions to be in place by October 1995

The Task Force agreed that for a Australian Tertiary Admissions System to function effectively with the degree of accuracy required and within the tight timelines necessary for processing large numbers of applications, a highly efficient and reliable mechanism for communication is essential. Such a mechanism is required for communication and verification of scores, registration of offers made, recording of acceptances, and a number of related matters.

Existing arrangements for electronic transfer of information between secondary assessment bodies, State admissions authorities and tertiary institutions, while varying between States and Territories, go a long way towards the system which is required. Transfer of information within States and interstate is increasingly done through AARNet. Progress on this issue is already occurring as rapidly as the technology and resources allow.

The Task Force recommends the progressive extension of the use of electronic networking for communication between admissions centres and institutions, both universities and TAFEs.

Common data and coding structures for use on application forms

Admissions centres have been engaged for some time in developing the Higher Education Applicant Data Collection (HEADC) with DEET support.

The Task Force considers it unnecessary to attempt to produce a single common application form. This is not practical given the size of the complete set of information that would need to be captured if a single application process were to be put in place and current processing requirements of all admissions centres were to be met. However, all admissions centres have agreed to work towards a common set of data definitions (corresponding to those used in the DEET student data collection) for a subset of the HEADC, in which all centres have agreed to participate on an annual basis. This core of variables with common definitions is to include year of intake, date of birth, sex, citizen/resident indicator, Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander code, country of birth, year of arrival in Australia, language spoken at home, highest qualification, prior educational experience (postgraduate, degree, subdegree course (not at TAFE), subdegree (at TAFE), TAFE award course, secondary education course at TAFE, secondary education course at school, other qualification/certificate and relevant year), highest offered preference, highest accepted preference, highest enrolled preference, and highest deferred preference. QTAC has undertaken to coordinate the collection each year.

The Task Force also notes the collection of these data needs to be consistent, where possible, with other statistical systems. For example, the data definitions should be consistent with those used in the vocational educational data system, AVETMIS. Appropriate data linkages are also desirable to minimise the collection of data.

The Task Force believes that the work toward common data and coding structures is a matter best handled by the admissions centre heads, with advice on progress to be reported through the Task Force to MCEETYA in 1996.

The Task Force seek and report on appropriate linkages between these developments and the proposed Australian Credit Transfer Agency

Task Force members have met with representatives of the pilot Australian Credit Transfer Agency (ACTA) to ensure that the development of an Australian tertiary admissions system interfaces as appropriate with ACTA. It is clear that the development of an Australian tertiary admissions system is consistent with and will be assisted by the establishment of ACTA. The Commonwealth advises that tenders will be let for the permanent establishment of ACTA late this year. The specifications will need to draw attention to linkages with the Australian tertiary Admissions System.

Recommendations

That MCEETYA

- (a) agrees to the implementation of the Australian Tertiary Admissions System built around the continuing operation of existing tertiary admission systems
- (b) agrees to the implementation of the following common dates
 - (i) the last working day in September as the date by which receipt of a main round application would guarantee its processing
 - (ii) for 1996 the latest date for main round offers to be 24 January and the last date for responding to main round offers no earlier than 27 January, with admission centres in later years endeavouring to allow a longer gap between the last day of publications of main round offers and the latest day for responding to offers, by moving forward the date of publication of main round offers.
- (c) agrees to a target of the first working day of January as the latest date for release of Year 12 results to students

- (d) agrees that there should be a single national approach to the calculation of tertiary entrance rank equivalences across States to be available for tertiary intakes in 1997
- (e) agrees to the use of the "home state rule" for interstate applicants, and to the use of the home state university entrance rank (where more than one ranking is awarded) for interstate applicants to universities
- (f) supports the progressive extension of the use of electronic networking for communication between admissions centres and institutions, both universities and TAFEs
- (g) endorses the collection of a core set of data, with common data definitions, covering demographics and previous education experience, to be handled by the heads of tertiary admission centres
- (h) agrees to the continuation of the Task Force, with a view to
 - (i) investigating the benefits of and options for further integration of the admission practices of the vocational education sector with the Australian Tertiary Admission System
 - (ii) the design of a research project that will lead to a methodology for calculation of interstate tertiary entrance rank equivalences
 - (iii) undertaking further work on the legal underpinnings of equivalence determinations, and on the equality of treatment for interstate applicants seeking admission without a tertiary entrance rank, through other entry points
 - (iv) reporting to MCEETYA on progress toward common data and coding structures.

THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION AUTHORITIES

The Use of Year 12 Assessment Data for
Tertiary Education Entry

REPORT ON A CONFERENCE HELD IN SYDNEY
OCTOBER 1994

MARCH 1995

Prepared by the Board of Studies New South Wales

REPORT ON A CONFERENCE HELD AT THE NOVOTEL BRIGHTON BEACH SYDNEY ON 10 & 11 OCTOBER 1994 TO CONSIDER FURTHER THE USE OF YEAR 12 ASSESSMENT DATA FOR TERTIARY ENTRANCE.

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Report prepared by ^{s 47F}
for the New South Wales Board of Studies

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Conference of representatives of State and Territory 'Boards' (examining and assessing authorities), Tertiary Admissions Centres, Universities and TAFE authorities met in Sydney on 10/11 October, 1994 with the aim of improving the use of Year 12 data and other processes to provide less complex and more equitable access to courses and institutions within and between States and Territories. The Conference made an important early decision, by consensus of all present, that its deliberations should relate to all tertiary, not merely to higher education. The goal of the Conference was then seen as Australian Year 12 students being able to pursue their application for places in tertiary education at Australian locations of interest and value to them without having to overcome bureaucratic, administrative, statistical or, indeed, any unintended barriers.

There have been interest and action for a considerable period to improve cross-border enrolment. At various times there have been proposals for a national tertiary entrance centre and some unsuccessful attempts to set up such a structure. In 1992 Dr Milton Clark and Dr Vivian Evers reported on a study proposed by ACACA and commissioned by the AEC on the use of Year 12 data for higher education entry. Some of the recommendations of that Report have been carried forward in the form of greater co-operation between various authorities, in the commissioning of a further project on common data and terminology and in the setting up of the Sydney Conference.

The Conference was structured to ascertain the areas of consensus among participants in relation to further steps which could be taken to improve the effectiveness and equity of tertiary enrolment processes. It built on the Clark/Evers Report and its recommendations, received input from a number of information papers and gave consideration to a proposal by Professor Robert Pargetter, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Monash University, for a national tertiary admissions system.

The information papers presented to the Conference dealt with:

- i) a recent legal challenge by an interstate applicant who was unsuccessful in gaining entry to particular courses in NSW, a proposed change in NSW Tertiary Entrance Score requirements and the impact of that change on mutual recognition of enrolment eligibility across States,
- ii) the procedures for determining admission to TAFE courses in the different States and Territories and problems facing TAFE in participating in common admission processes,
- iii) a system (Queensland Tertiary Admission) which uses a multi-stage selection process and offers places for admission to both higher education and TAFE courses
- iv) the use of age and candidature cohort models as a basis for calculating Tertiary Entrance Ranks and comparing them between States and Territories,
- v) technical aspects of the reporting of students' scores, the development and comparison of ranking, use of reference tests, and the reliability and validity of fine and coarse grained scales.

Professor Pargetter's proposal for a national tertiary entrance system (as opposed to a national centre) incorporates a number of key elements:

- ▶ maintenance of autonomous state and territory based admissions centres,
- ▶ integration of TAFE and Higher Education into a single State or Territory system of admission where this has not already occurred.
- ▶ co-ordination of dates for Year 12 results, amendment of preferences, offers and acceptance of places,

- ▶ agreement by each State and Territory to move to a TER (of their own design) where this has not occurred and to restructure their own selection processes in terms of use of this rank and other factors,
- ▶ a review of TERs so that they are not over-demanding but remain adequate for both academic and vocational studies with the use of grades and prerequisites for any necessary compensation,
- ▶ adjustment of TERs, such as by determination of student cohort, to allow ranks to be more comparable,
- ▶ moving naturally to a two-stage process of selection involving initial application of the TER and then further selection from a middle band of applicants using some specified index of criteria for each course.

At the conclusion of the Conference the participants resolved, without dissent, to give in principle endorsement to the general directions of Professor Pargetter's paper.

Meanwhile consideration continued on the matters raised by the Clark/Eyers Report, in the information papers presented and through discussion in groups structured to identify issues, problems and areas of agreement.

The following targets, relating mainly to the processing of data, received very strong support from the Conference and led to firm recommendations:

- ▶ Elimination of unnecessary/unproductive differences in ways of collecting, reporting and certificating Year 12 assessment data across the different States and Territories.
- ▶ Improved bilateral translations of entry scores between pairs of States or Territories.
- ▶ Common terminology for statistical treatment of data in use in all States and Territories.
- ▶ Close timing, common formats and common methods (including compatible computer systems) for exchange of Year 12 assessment information between concerned parties, also in relation to tertiary entrance offers.

One proposal receiving similarly strong support related both to processing and wider issues of policy and organisation and led to agreement to endorse the establishment of a co-operative national system, but not a national centre, for tertiary admission.

Other targets which received major support and, despite some significant minority concerns, led to recommendations were:

- ▶ Course entry selection into all tertiary institutions based on something more, or other, than a single score index.
- ▶ Co-ordination of TAFE and Higher Education application processes.

Several issues received major support from the Conference and while they can be regarded as having in principle support with that given to the Pargetter proposals, the nature and/or level of dissent was such that proposals put forward were not endorsed as recommendations. These included:

- ▶ Retention of diversity in the course offerings and eligibility/selection criteria and procedures used in Australian tertiary institutions.
- ▶ Acceptance of students by Tertiary Institutions on the basis of recommendations/rankings from the students' home States or Territories.

- TER scores in all States and Territories allowing for performance in vocationally oriented courses.

Other matters were discussed and proposals were put forward but received only quite limited support.

Late in the Conference program the structured processes designed to identify areas of consensus on targets, problems to be overcome and directions to be followed were discontinued. Participants then considered proposals for action and endorsed the following recommendations:

The Conference recommends that ACACA (the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities) take the following action:

1. Request MCEETYA (the Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) to:
 - 1.1 Endorse the principle of a co-operative national system (as opposed to a single National Centre) for tertiary admission as outlined in the Pargetter paper.
 - 1.2 Encourage the use of multi-staged selection processes for tertiary admission and
 - 1.3 Provide funds for research into staged selection
 - 1.4 Endorse the principle of each State and Territory moving to a TER of its own design (where this has not already occurred) and restructuring its own selection processes in terms of the use of this TE rank and/or other factors which may have course or institutional significance.
 - 1.5 Encourage each State and Territory admission centre and relevant TAFE authority to co-ordinate TAFE and Higher Education application processes where this has not already been done.
 - 1.6 Endorse and facilitate the establishment of a working party to co-ordinate critical dates in the tertiary entrance processes.
 - 1.7 Contribute funding for research to investigate the validity of the age-cohort method of matching notional TERs between States and Territories.
 - 1.8 Fund a sustained program to provide enhanced information to students about options available to them both in their home states and nationally.
2. Request the AVCC (Australian Vice Chancellors Committee) and the NTCC (National TAFE Chief Executives Committee) to:
 - 2.1 Conduct a study into the impact of moving the start of the academic year back six months.
 - 2.2 Ask tertiary institutions throughout Australia to consider adjustments to the academic year in order to facilitate common dates and effective admission systems across the country.
3. Request ACHTAC (Australian Conference of Heads of Tertiary Admissions Centres) and individual admissions centres to:
 - 3.1 Investigate the implementation of staged selection processes.
 - 3.2 Set up a working party in each State and Territory where staged selection is not already in place, in order to develop machinery to implement such a process.

- 3.3 Identify common data elements and coding structures for use on application forms.
4. Request ACHTAC in consultation with and agreement by State and Territory Assessment and Certification Authorities to:
 - 4.1 Agree that on an interim basis an age-cohort method for interstate comparisons of TERs should be adopted nationwide.
 - 4.2 Work towards a common offer date for all tertiary entry.
 - 4.3 Set a common offer date for university places for 1996 as 22 or 24 January.
 - 4.4 Provide a two week (minimum) space for all students to reconsider/change tertiary preferences.
 - 4.5 Aim to have school system results available before Christmas and accept the first working day in January as the latest date for availability.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 ORIGIN OF THE CONFERENCE

There has been interest, for some decades, in the concept of a national basis for entry to tertiary education. Attempts to develop and apply national tests or to set up national systems have not succeeded but interest has continued. As recently as July 1994 the Federal Minister for Education and Training, The Hon S Crean, was reported as wanting a national tertiary admissions centre to encourage more students to travel interstate to find the courses best suited to them.

In recent years there has also been growing concern about the fairness of processes used in the allocation of university places to the growing number of applicants from interstate.

In 1991 the Australian Education Council acting on a proposal from ACACA commissioned a project to investigate the nature and use of Year 12 assessment data for higher education entry. The researchers, Dr Milton Clark and Dr Vivian Evers, assembled information on Year 12 populations, Year 12 assessment data, the transformation of assessment data and its processing and use, both within and between States and Territories, in determining student access to higher education.

Published in April 1992 the Clark/Evers Report provided information on Year 12 assessment data and identified a range of issues associated with its use. It made a number of recommendations to the AEC, particularly in relation to the provision of equitable entry to higher education institutions across Australia regardless of the applicant's State or Territory of origin.

The Report recommended three stages of action. As part of Stage 2 the Report recommended that:

'...the AEC sponsors an initial conference of relevant senior representatives of ACACA, ACHTAC and the AVCC, with any necessary technical support, to consider and plan co-operative actions in support of the activities listed in' (the short term and longer term recommendations of the Report).

The 1994 Sydney Conference grew out of the recommendations of the Clark/Evers Report of 1992. Some of the recommendations of the Report had already been addressed, for example by The Year 12 Data Comparability Project (1993 and ongoing) but much was still to be considered.

In the meantime, developments since 1991 in post-compulsory education and training, including entry to tertiary institutions, presented additional elements to be considered by assessment authorities, admissions centres, universities and other tertiary institutions. It had become

important to add representatives of NTCC (National TAFE Chief Executives Committee) to those of the other authorities participating in the Conference.

2.2 MAJOR ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE CLARK/EYERS REPORT OF 1992

The Report identified a range of major issues relating to cross-state entry to higher education, issues considered by the researchers to be important and involving unresolved matters needing attention.

The issues identified were concerned principally with the processes of gaining, transforming, matching and utilising data. They were presented in a series of questions about means for improving cross-State entry to higher education, followed by discussion of a single selection index, scaling, cross-State conversion tables, difficulties with data and processing difficulties. In their consideration of processing issues the writers identified some matters which involved wider questions of philosophy and/or policy as, for example, the major changes implied in emerging pathways to higher education. They also recognised the importance of communication and the need for better public documentation.

In all, the issues identified and discussed led directly to the recommendations of the Report and, eventually, to the consideration of many of those recommendations by the Sydney Conference.

2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CLARK/EYERS REPORT

The Report recommended, as Stage 1, that the AEC affirm its interest in promoting and supporting procedures whereby applicants with appropriate Year 12 Certification can confidently and knowledgeably seek equitable entry to higher education institutions across Australia, regardless of their State or Territory of origin, and that the AEC further this interest by encouraging and supporting the following activities and investigations.

- 2.1 by ACACA: the introduction of common criteria and relevant terminology for data statistics among its members.
- 2.2 by ACACA in conjunction with Admission Agencies: common ways of providing and formatting assessment advice to group members and for closer timing ...
- 2.3 by the Admission Agencies: ways of improving the bilateral translations of entry scores between pairs of States and Territories.
- 2.4 by the AVCC: establishing common prerequisites (if any are needed) for entry to courses of a similar nature and content among higher education institutions.

(The AEC, and later MCEETYA, maintained the interest and encouragement. The Sydney Conference noted progress which has been made and included each of the above for discussion by the Conference members).

The Stage 2 recommendations of the Report were that the AEC sponsor an initial conference ... to consider and plan co-operative actions in support of the above activities and the following longer term actions:

- 3.1 by ACACA: ways of resolving any unnecessary and potentially unproductive differences among members in their modes of collecting, reporting and certificating assessment data.
- 3.2 by agencies responsible for scaling procedures applied to Year 12 achievement scores; ways of reducing the extent of differences between the nature of current procedures, and the incorporation of due consideration of errors of measurement into these procedures.

- 3.3 by the higher education institutions, ... in conjunction with ..., agencies involved in the scaling and aggregation of assessments: ways of further supplementing or replacing the use of single score indices as the basis for the course entry selection of direct school leavers, as already occurring in some institutions.
- 3.4 by all groups, ... including ..., secondary education systems: the value and feasibility of using ASAT or an equivalent instrument as a common reference measure in all States and Territories.'

The Sydney Conference as the 'initial conference' did consider each of the above actions, endorsed some and, in turn, made recommendations to MCEETYA and the represented agencies to carry forward those endorsed.

2.4 DEVELOPMENTS IN POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Sydney Conference took place in a context of ongoing change and development in post-compulsory education and training in Australia, including the development of different pathways to tertiary education. The Clark/Eyers Report drew attention to some of these developments, already under way in 1991, and foreshadowed a range of matters which might impact on entry to higher (and other tertiary) education in future. Still other changes and developments have occurred since the Report was written.

Significant changes and developments in post-compulsory education and training have taken place. Those which are or may be relevant to entry to tertiary education include:

- ▶ dramatic increases in retention rates in the senior secondary school with Year 12 enrolments an increasing proportion of the age cohort and increasingly diverse in interests and ability.
- ▶ the development of a range of vocational and general education courses in the senior high school, often with a direct connection with TAFE.
- ▶ growing overlap of courses and components of courses between school and TAFE and, more recently, indication of a similar overlap of senior school and university courses,
- ▶ the development of the key competencies concept and its application to education and training, the specification of outcomes and an accompanying shift in emphasis from normative to criterion based assessment,
- ▶ a tendency to require end of school certification to be based on two-year, Years 11/12 programs,
- ▶ a diminishing proportion of students who are entering higher education coming directly from Year 12, and
- ▶ introduction of different pathways to higher and other tertiary education,
- ▶ increasing use of student information other than, or in addition to, a Tertiary Entrance Rank in determining admission to courses and institutions,
- ▶ development of staged selection processes,
- ▶ the offer of higher and other tertiary places through a single admissions agency in some States,
- ▶ the development of national curriculum frameworks for primary and lower secondary education and the foreshadowing of the development of similar frameworks for senior secondary curriculum,
- ▶ the development of common levels of awards in TAFE across the nation.

Several of these developments were drawn to the attention of the Conference by Sam Weller in his introduction to the Conference. Some, such as the processing of entry to TAFE and other tertiary, non-university institutions by the present higher education admissions agencies and the use of multi-element and staged processes of admission, were incorporated in discussion and received acknowledgment in the final recommendations. Some others were raised in discussion from time to time during the Conference but, for the most part, received little recognition in the final deliberations and no place in the recommendations. Still other matters, such as higher education entry through TAFE by the completion of associate diplomas or entry by applicants from overseas, received no attention at all. No doubt many issues will need to be reconsidered if, and when, MCEETYA and the represented agencies proceed to address the recommendations made by the Conference.

3. CONFERENCE PROCEDURE

3.1 INTRODUCTION AND SETTING THE CENTRAL GOAL

Sam Weller, President of the Board of Studies New South Wales and currently Chairman of ACACA, presented a paper, Setting the Context - Background Issues, to open the Conference. He drew attention to the very topical nature of change and review in the use of Year 12 assessment data for tertiary entrance, quoting several relevant statements appearing in just one Sydney newspaper during the preceding week alone. He identified the scope of the Conference, provided information on the size of the cross-State entry problem, noted the issues identified in the Clark/Eyers Report which needed to be addressed and then reiterated the central goal of the Conference that,

'Australian Year 12 students should be able to pursue their application for places in higher education at Australian locations of interest and value to them without having to overcome bureaucratic, administrative, statistical or, indeed, any unintended barriers.'

This goal was immediately debated and within minutes of the beginning of the Conference the word 'higher' had been amended to 'tertiary' to include higher education and TAFE.

3.2 CONFERENCE PROCESSES

The Conference participants met in sector groups (universities, admissions centres, certifying authorities, TAFE and DEET), to give consideration to targets based on the Clark/Eyers recommendations and any obstacles which stood in the way. Following an analysis of the views of the groups several papers were presented to provide further information.

After discussion of the issues raised by the papers presented and their relevance to the overall objectives of the Conference a proposal paper was presented by Professor Robert PARGETTER, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Monash University. Extensive discussion followed Professor Pargetter's presentation and the Conference later gave 'endorsement, in principle to the general directions' of his paper.

Further targets were now recorded as having major support of the Conference. At the suggestion of some participants the formal consensus seeking process was then abandoned and the Conference moved into open forum with proposals for action being discussed, voted on and recorded as recommendations.

4. PAPERS PRESENTED TO THE CONFERENCE

Several papers were presented to the Conference to provide information, raise further issues and/or present an argument. The papers were:

A. INFORMATION PAPERS

4.1 University Admission (in NSW) from 1996 onwards - compulsory inclusion of one unit of English in NSW Tertiary Entrance Rank.

In this paper Ken GABB, Senior Advisings Officer in the NSW Crown Solicitor's Office reviews the case of Sweeney vs The University of Sydney and Others. A Victorian student applying for entry to courses at some universities in NSW on the basis of his Victorian VCE results challenged the decision of the universities not to admit him to several faculties. The decision relied on a notional TER drawn from the student's four core VCE units without consideration of 'bonus' marks. Although the case is under appeal Mr Gabb examines the implications of the decision by the NSW universities that, from 1996 onwards, at least one unit of English must be included in the calculation of every student's TER.

The paper raised questions of eligibility (matriculation) and competitive entry to courses, pre-requisites, requirements for interstate applicants and mutual recognition.

4.2 Sweeney and Todd vs The NSW Universities (1996)

Professor John MACK, Chairman of Academic Board, School of Mathematics and Statistics, University of Sydney, develops the issues raised in Ken Gabb's paper and considers the implications for students in other States and Territories seeking places in courses at NSW universities from 1996. He addresses the questions of TER eligibility, an equivalent TER and prescribed additional requirements for specific degree programs.

4.3 Beyond the TER - TAFE Student Selection

TAFE student selection is set in the context of a range of issues, not just the use of Year 12 assessment data, in this paper by Judy BYRNE, General Manager, Educational Development, NSW TAFE Commission. She sets out the basis and process of admission to TAFE in each State and the ACT, noting a diversity of approaches but a common trend away from the exclusive use of Year 12 data and ranking. She then gives a number of reasons for widening the approach to student selection in TAFE systems. The reasons are identified in six current issues: Higher Levels of Participation, National Training Agenda, Key Competencies, General Education in the Post-Compulsory Sector, Research and Access and Equity. She then offers a 'way forward' and conclusions in relation to the place of the TER, reform of the senior school curriculum, use of qualitative data in selection, more effective methods of informing students about options and defensibility and accountability in relation to selection methods.

(The papers by Gabb, Mack and Byrne were presented to a plenary session of the Conference. Each of the following four papers was presented four times to smaller groups of the Conference participants in rotation.)

4.4 The Queensland Approach to Tertiary Selection.

A comprehensive paper by Peter KRUGER, Deputy Managing Director, Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre, setting out the Queensland process of selection utilised (through QTAC) by both TAFE colleges and the universities in that State. The use of a single TER has been replaced by a staged (stepwise) approach which involves three phases - establishment of a range of accepted criteria, synthesising the elements into an overall measure of relative standing, and allocation of places. Part of this process for Queensland current school leavers involves a Student Education Profile with an Overall Position, five Field Positions, a Core Skills Test result and subject achievement levels. Essential features of the Queensland process are predetermined and published prerequisites, relativities and procedures. Mr Kruger provided additional information in the form of statistics relating to applications across State borders in the 1993-1994 admission period.

4.5 The Cohort Issue - Age vs Candidature

Bob EDWARDS, Director, ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies, examines the use of the candidature model and the age cohort model in calculating (and comparing) tertiary entrance ranks. The paper puts forward the procedures for calculating the different types of model, considers the suitability of each in converting TE scores and ranks and then proposes that States and Territories consider as options, the use of a sample population sitting a scaling test to be used for interstate applicants only and/or the use of the (age) cohort model as their preferred approach to interstate conversions.

4.6 The Nature of Score Data

This paper by Dr D J DALEY, Australian National university, presents a statistical model that describes TE scores and comments on various methods of reporting both subject scores and a TE admissions index. Dr Daley notes that there are problems associated with the use of common reference tests or either a candidature population or an age cohort as a basis for comparison of aggregate based scores and ranks. The paper is a reminder also that distortions can occur in any scaling processes and that the use of narrow bands, for example, can conceal discriminating differences.

4.7 The Effect on Measurement Reliability of Reducing a Fine-Grained Scale to a Coarser-Grained Scale

This statistical paper by Dr Robert MacCANN, Head Special Projects Group, NSW Board of Studies, considers a specific issue identified in Dr Daley's paper; the reliability of the aggregate and its relationship to the fineness of the reporting scale. The paper examines the view that, if a fine-grained scale is considered too unreliable to justify the level of precision, it can be made more reliable by reducing the number of categories and shows this view to be a misconception. Dr MacCann demonstrates that, regardless of its reliability, if a scale is converted to one with fewer categories, then the reliability of measurement is reduced. Dr MacCann considers that the greater reliability of a fine-grained scale does not imply a reduction in measurement validity, but, in fact, it should increase predictive validity.

Each participant was also given, for information, a draft copy of

- ▶ Leaving School 1994 - A Guide to Year 12 Certificates and Tertiary Entrance Statements in Australia produced by ACACA and a copy of
- ▶ The Use of Year 12 Assessment Data for Higher Education Entry. The CLARK/EYERS paper of April, 1992.

B. PROPOSAL PAPER

4.10 Towards a National Tertiary Admissions System

Professor Robert PARGETTER, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Monash University, first sets out the background and motivation for his proposals for change to tertiary selection in terms of 'five not unrelated considerations':

- ▶ political pressure for a more unitary selection system,
- ▶ the need to assist in the development of a culture of tertiary education 'away from home,
- ▶ the likelihood that the unified national system may require greater movement of students to gain the courses they want,
- ▶ the need to handle interstate applications well in a way that does not disadvantage the applicant,
- ▶ the likely, perhaps dramatic, increase in interstate applicants.

Professor Pargetter concludes that 'there is a need for a system of tertiary selection that allows students to apply for institutions across state and territory boundaries, that ensure they are treated equitably in their applications and that they are not disadvantaged in any other application by having made an interstate application, and also to ensure that the whole process is simple and open so that a culture of national application is encouraged and that students do not believe they are prevented by the process.'

The second part of the paper asks 'What is wrong with the present system?' and suggests that while there is not much wrong with the approach, the details of the system present major problems. He lists fifteen such details.

Professor Pargetter then suggests that there are two possible approaches; making tertiary selection a national process or addressing many of the difficulties within the present state-and-territory based process. He urges the latter, stressing that this would not lead to a national tertiary admission centre but that it could lead to a national tertiary admission system.

In the third section of the paper Professor Pargetter first canvasses the advantages and disadvantages of a National Tertiary Admissions Centre and concludes that it would not be feasible in either political or practical terms. He then identifies the following features of a National Admissions System:

- ▶ maintenance of autonomous State and Territory based admissions centres and hence multiple applications and first round offers,
- ▶ an immediate move to address the problems he had listed using an agreed timetable and monitoring by a small secretariat of the AEC,
- ▶ continuation of the dialogue with further operational agreements between Admissions Centres and new arrangements with the 'Boards'.

He then identifies three concerns that must be addressed with urgency:

- i) Issues that require immediate attention and determination by Governments, and the co-operation of School Boards, Admissions Centres and TAFE bodies. These include:
 - ▶ integration of TAFE and Higher Education into a single State or Territory system of admission where this has not already occurred;
 - ▶ co-ordination of dates for school results, offers, acceptance etc.
 - ▶ agreement by each state and territory to move to a TER (of their own design) where this has not occurred and to restructure their own selection processes in terms of use of this rank and other factors ...',
 - ▶ make some adjustment to the ... TERs to allow ranks to be more comparable ... such as determination of student cohort ...',
 - ▶ agreement by School Boards and Admissions Centres to provide with more refinement the data needed to determine as accurate as possible notional TERs.
- ii) Resolution of present tensions concerning the nature of a TER and its acceptance by higher education and the training sectors including the question of inclusion of vocational units and (compensatory) pre-requisites if necessary.

- iii) Demonstration that the problems of a national system are soluble and that a National Admissions Centre is undesirable and impracticable.

In the fourth section of the paper the problems are examined in relation to accuracy and precision in ranks and selection. The author concludes that the final ranking of applicants should be determined not just by a TER but by a two-stage process.

Finally Professor Pargetter sets out in summary his strategy of working within existing frameworks to achieve his 'modest proposal':

- ▶ Integration of selection for TAFE and Higher Education
- ▶ Review of TERs to be not over-demanding but adequate for both academic and vocational studies
- ▶ Consideration of the use grades and prerequisites for any necessary compensation
- ▶ Co-operation to determine fair notional TERs
- ▶ Specification of TER and cohort and adoption of tables of prerequisites, hopefully leading to common acceptance
- ▶ Moving naturally to a two-stage process
 - (i) application of the TER giving admission of 85% to 0%, according to the course,
 - (ii) selection from a middle band of applicants using some specified index of criteria for each course.

A COPY OF PROFESSOR PARGETTER'S PAPER IS INCLUDED AS APPENDIX 9.2

5. ISSUES CONSIDERED - DEBATE, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference was structured to consider the issues presented in the Clark/Eyers Report, together with other issues that have emerged since 1991, in terms of Targets to be achieved and Obstacles to be overcome. During this process and subsequent debate very few targets identified or recommendations proposed received unanimous support or support without dissent. With one exception those which did receive such support were issues relating to processing rather than matters involving policy. There appeared to be a consensus that progress would best be made in small steps by first addressing the means of processing data within and between States and Territories and considering 'basic' issues, those involving policy or underlying philosophy, later. A second group of targets received major, if qualified support and some opposition but did not necessarily lead to accepted recommendations.

ISSUES RELATING TO DATA PROCESSING

5.1 Greater Co-operation Between the States and Territories

In this area there was considerable agreement among Conference participants, including unanimous (or at least unchallenged) support for a range of changes and developments in the area of processing of data. In general terms this agreement was expressed in strong support for the following four 'targets':

Elimination of unnecessary/unproductive differences in ways of collecting, reporting and certifying Year 12 assessment data across the different States and Territories.

Improved bilateral translations of entry scores between pairs of States or Territories.

Common terminology for statistical treatment of data in use in all States and Territories.

Close timing, common formats and common methods (including compatible computer systems) for exchange of Year 12 assessment information between concerned parties, also in relation to tertiary entrance offers.

These 'targets' do, of course, directly reflect four of the Clark/Eyers recommendations [3.1, 2.3, 2.1 & 2.2] to ACACA and the Admissions Agencies. The issues concerned were again identified in Professor Pargetter's paper [p.10 points 2 to 5 under (i)] as matters needing immediate attention. Conference participants noted that action had already been taken by the agencies concerned towards achievement of these targets, as for example by the Year 12 Data Comparability Project being managed for the AEC (now MCEETYA) by the ACT Board of Senior School Studies. Participants were confident that co-operation would continue at the agency level. Encouragement to further action was implicit in the Conference resolution to give in principle endorsement to the general directions of the Pargetter paper.

Some of the elements in these issues were the subject of further discussion at the Conference.

5.2 Common Application Forms

A proposal that there should be common application forms across Australia for Tertiary entry was rejected as impracticable [too much data not relevant to all admissions agencies] and unacceptable [some universities may object]. There was agreement, however, to match terminology where possible and to identify common data elements and coding structures for application forms. [CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATION 3.3]

5.3 Timing of Advice of TER and Offers of Tertiary Places

There was extensive discussion about the problems faced by applicants in reconsidering their preferences in the short time available in many States between the publication of the TER or equivalent information, the closing date for amending preferences and the date of first round offers. There was general agreement that a common offer date, say 22 or 24 January should be adopted by all States and Territories, preferably for 1996. As it was considered that applicants should have a minimum of ten days for change of preferences this would mean publishing Year 12 results on the first day of January or even earlier. The use of external examinations as one component in Year 12 assessment was recognised as a potential delaying factor but notwithstanding this it was agreed to pursue the common dates.

Different solutions were proposed and the advantages and disadvantages discussed. Two approaches were pursued:

- i) request State and Territory Assessment and Certification Authorities to change processes and work for common dates and more time for students, while requesting MCEETYA to set up a working party to co-ordinate critical dates. [CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS 1.6, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, & 4.5]
- ii) request tertiary institutions throughout Australia to consider adjustments to the academic year, for example by later starting and finishing dates, and request AVCC to conduct a study into the impact of moving the start of the academic year. [CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS 2.1 & 2.2.] Participants recognised that these approaches, particularly the second, involved 'policy' issues rather than just adjustment to the timing of processes.

5.4 Use of Reference Tests or Cohorts in Establishing Comparability of TERs.

In pursuing the aim of 'improving the bilateral translations of entry scores between pairs of States and Territories' [Clark / Eyers 2.3] there was considerable comment about the

suitability of the use of different types of cohort and/or a common reference test for the purpose of comparing notional TERs between States. There are questions of policy as well as the mechanics of processing in this issue as noted below. Nevertheless there was agreement that the use of the same cohort by all States and Territories would give greater reliability to comparisons. It was agreed that the age-cohort is more reliable - or less unreliable - than candidature 'cohorts' [see Edwards paper]. Accordingly the Conference resolved to request ACHTAC to seek agreement to use of the age-cohort - taken to be age 17 as at 30 June - on an interim basis nationwide and request MCEETYA to contribute funding for research into the validity of the age-cohort method of matching notional TERs. [CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS 4.1 & 1.7]

Clark/Eyers had also recommended (3.4) consideration of 'the value and feasibility of using ASAT or an equivalent instrument as a common reference measure in all States and Territories'. Early in the Conference deliberations there had been proposals for the use of a common reference test to be taken by all Year 12 or all interstate applicants or by a sample of students to provide a measure against which to compare the various TERs or their equivalent. Concern was expressed, however, about matters such as sample size, security, motivation and the acceptability of such tests in some States. Further, participants were reminded that such tests were themselves subject to bias or error, particularly when applied to differing populations. (Daley). In the light of concerns expressed and practical considerations the Conference rejected proposals to use, or investigate the use of reference tests.

Another proposal for use of a reference test, to implement a nation-wide aptitude test for special entry applicants, mainly mature age non school leavers was also rejected.

ISSUES INVOLVING POLICY

As noted above there was little agreement about changes beyond those relating to the processing of data. A further four targets did receive major support but in each case there was some dissent, often strongly expressed by a small minority. The four targets were:

Course entry selection into all tertiary institutions based on something more, or other, than a single score index.

Diversity retained in the course offerings and eligibility/selection criteria and procedures used in Australian tertiary institutions.

Tertiary institutions accept students on the basis of recommendations/rankings from the students' home States or Territories.

TER scores in all States and Territories allow performance in vocationally oriented courses.

Most other issues discussed, in the forms of targets presented or recommendations proposing changes in 'policy', received minority support only and were not carried forward.

5.5 A National Centre or a National System for Tertiary Admissions.

This was the one 'policy' issue on which there was agreement without dissent. As indicated above, Professor Pargetter in his paper canvassed the arguments for and against a National Centre for Tertiary Admissions as opposed to a co-ordinated national system which would preserve State and Territory diversity and independence while at the same time give applicants the advantages of a co-ordinated, simpler and more easily understood process. There was no support for the establishment of a single National Centre whether managed co-operatively or as a Federal Government Agency. The Conference carried this agreement forward in general endorsement of Professor Pargetter's paper, [CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATION 1.1], and in a number of recommendations, mostly about processing, to various agencies.

5.6 Diversity in Institutions.

As indicated above one of the major targets proposed by the Conference participants envisaged 'diversity retained in the course offerings and eligibility/selection criteria and procedures used in Australian tertiary institutions'. Diversity seen as critically important in meeting student needs and preferences. It is expected that the demand for places out of home State will continue to increase generally and be reinforced by decisions such as those of Sydney, Queensland and Flinders Universities to offer medicine for graduate intake only.

Another reason for support for easier access to higher (and tertiary) education across States and Territories was the view that improved opportunity for out of State enrolment was important for maintenance of diversity among institutions under a unified national system.

Utilisation of the diversity by the student body was regarded as a necessary factor in the maintenance of that very diversity. Out of State enrolment should be encouraged and facilitated as a means of broadening Australia's tertiary entrance culture. [NO SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS WERE MADE but the view is consistent with the Pargetter Paper p.2]

5.7 Eligibility Across States and Territories.

5.7.1 Mutual Acceptance of General Eligibility

There was extensive discussion about the concept of general eligibility for enrolment in an institution (seen by many as the equivalent of the term, 'matriculation'). There was general agreement that each State and Territory should accept the indices determined by other authorities, especially after the application of processes to enhance comparability. One of the targets developed early in the discussion was a situation in which 'Tertiary institutions accept students on the basis of recommendations/rankings from the students' home States or Territories'.

The Conference considered strongly supported proposals for extension of this principle into a national agreement that students who satisfied their own State requirements for eligibility would have national acceptance.

Despite wide support for the concept of general eligibility the Conference did not adopt any recommendation on this matter.

5.7.2 Eligibility and Competitive Entry

The issue of eligibility was clouded in two ways, at first by the use of indices (TERs and notional TERs) more for the purpose of determining competitive places in university courses than in granting some generalised type of eligibility. Transportability of general eligibility based on a home State TER (as opposed to entry to institutions and/or courses with specific requirements) would probably have been acceptable to all participants were the issue not further clouded by the second factor, the decision by the universities in NSW in relation to English in the TER.

5.7.3 English and the NSW TER from 1996

As indicated in the papers by Ken Gabb and John Mack the NSW universities have decided (after years of public comment on the issue) to require, from 1996, at least one unit of English in the TER. This raised the question of the relationship of this requirement to the concept of eligibility. The one or more units of English will presumably be required in the notional TERs prepared for students applying from outside NSW. Portability will not be a problem for students coming from Victoria

where English is a compulsory component in VCE eligibility but it may well be a problem for say, South Australian or ACT students who are not required to include English in their home State TERs.

If the unit of English is required of applicants as a component of the 'local' TER in NSW only, while mutual eligibility of home State TERs is still accepted, then the English requirement will be irrelevant to non-NSW students. This could be seen, however, as imposing a disadvantage on some NSW students and the NSW universities may determine that the only notional TERs acceptable are those including English. If English is made a prerequisite (albeit one that has no prescribed minimum mark or level) for all courses, all interstate applicants without English will presumably be ineligible for NSW places.

It was clear that participants from several States and Territories were concerned by the possibility of TERs from some States and Territories no longer being transportable to NSW. A suggestion that English be adopted as a similar requirement in all States and Territories was not taken up.

The question of legal challenges by students was raised. Sweeney's challenge was (subject to appeal) unsuccessful but his TER was being used for competitive entry, not for general eligibility. The case of a barrister seeking admission to the Queensland bar and his successful appeal to the provision of Section 117 of the Constitution was mentioned but not discussed. The possibility of action under Section 92 was canvassed but this was considered not relevant as the requirement on interstate students would not be discriminatory as it also applied to NSW students.

The issue remains a problem. Conference participants from NSW universities pointed out that a legal challenge on the basis of eligibility, even if successful, may be ineffective were the English requirement to be applied (as the universities are competent to do) as a course prerequisite for each and every course or program offered in NSW universities. The relationship of the requirement, to overseas or mature or mature age or post diploma applicants was raised but not discussed. The issue is unresolved. The Conference made no recommendation on the matter but, clearly, some further consideration must be given or it will be a major impediment to the ideal of 'uniformity' in cross-state entry.

5.8 Common Prerequisites

The Clark/Eyers Report recommended (2.4) that the AVCC establish common prerequisites (if any are needed) for entry to courses of a similar nature and content among higher education institutions.

A target of common prerequisites for entry to tertiary courses of similar nature and content was proposed to the Conference but received very little support. The issue was somewhat clouded by discussion of the NSW English in the TER requirement and whether this constituted a TER prerequisite even though no level of marks would be required.

NO RECOMMENDATION WAS ADOPTED BY THE CONFERENCE but Pargetter's advocacy (p15) of agreement by Admissions Centres that they would apply tables of prerequisite equivalence as well as notional TERs to interstate applicants might be considered as accepted as part of the support in principle for that Paper, especially as Pargetter's view is that prerequisites should be not so much uniform but 'translatable'.

5.9 Higher and Tertiary - Greater Co-operation Between the Sectors

Offers of university and TAFE places in Queensland are made by the one centre, QTAC. Both common data and specific course requirement data are used in a multi stage process. Only one place (university or TAFE) is offered to each student in the first round. In other states offers are generally made by two independent systems and a student may

receive both a university and a TAFE offer. This situation is under review in some states with single centres and single offers being considered. There was strong support for greater coordination of application processes at least, by Admissions Centres and relevant TAFE authorities in each State and Territory. [CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATION 1.5]

Nevertheless, there are concerns in the TAFE sector about these processes and in particular about the use of the TER in selection for TAFE, the nature of the TER and its relevance as a predictor of success in TAFE courses. In her paper Judy BYRNE points out that while all TAFE authorities make some use of the TER (or other Year 12 data) a wide range of other selection methods is used and in some States, for example NSW, entirely different methods, involving industry experience, work folios and success in related courses are used. TAFE is also facing other problems in the selection process, problems not necessarily confined to TAFE. There is the problem of including criterion referenced subjects in a ranking exercise. Setting up cut-offs, determining levels of courses and setting prerequisites can be difficult. There is also the question of key competencies, in schooling and in vocational training, and their part, if any, in tertiary selection.

5.10 The Tertiary Entrance Rank and Other Criteria

There was strong Conference support for each State and Territory developing a TER of its own design (where this has not already occurred) and restructuring its own selection in terms of the use of this TE rank. This support was sustained despite a deal of evidence of the unreliability of the TER (Clark/Eyers Report and papers presented at the Conference) and reservations about its applicability to many tertiary courses. Professor Pargetter canvassed the problems of reliance on a single score; the errors in assessment and in the aggregation of results and the view that academic ability has multiple elements too complex to be measured on a single index. The recommendation which was endorsed, [CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATION 1.4], did, however, include the words 'and/or other factors which may have course or institutional significance'. Participants recognised both the value of the TER and the importance of other criteria in making assessments for the allocation of tertiary places.

One aspect of the nature of the TER which received considerable support, as a major target, during discussion and in the Pargetter paper was a proposal to include performance in vocationally oriented courses in TER scores.

5.11 Inclusion of Vocational Subjects in the TER

There has been a significant increase in the number of vocationally oriented courses in Year 12 school programs across the country. In NSW, for example, almost one third of students now include a vocationally related course in their programs. Many of the courses are conducted in conjunction with TAFE and, of those, a considerable proportion give some credit toward TAFE qualifications as well as appearing as part of the Year 12 credential.

Clearly, however, not all participants agreed on the place of vocational or vocationally oriented courses in the tertiary entrance selection process.

Because the courses were highly relevant to selection for entry to some TAFE courses their exclusion from the TER in NSW was seen by Judy Byrne as a case for TAFE not using the TER at all. Even their inclusion in the TER could leave problems of pressure on students trying to keep their options open [Byrne p. 7] unless the number of units used to calculate the TER were to be reduced, as advocated by Pargetter [p.11].

An earlier identified target: TER Scores in all States and Territories to allow performance in vocationally oriented courses received minor support but was not carried forward to a recommendation. General support, however, for staged selection processes implies acceptance of a role for vocationally oriented courses [CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS 1.2, 1.3, 3.1, 3.2]. In the Pargetter proposal vocational courses results could be part of the TER or part of the second stage criteria after application of the TER.

5.12 Staged Selection Processes

Whole there is no certainty that a staged selection process will better predict tertiary success, it does appear to serve equity in providing better discrimination within the 'middle band' of applicants. The three-stage selection process used in Queensland and clearly set out in Peter Kruger's paper provides a basis for judgement. Some other States have, or are considering, partial staged processes. TAFE multi-element entry processes appear to lend themselves to staged selection. As already noted Robert Pargetter's proposal for a national system involves a two stage process.

The Conference resolved to recommend staged selection processes both to MCEETYA seeking encouragement of the use of multi-staged processes and provision of funds for research into staged selection [CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS] 1.2, 1.3 and to ACHTAC and individual centres asking for investigation of the implementation of staged selection processes and the setting up of a working party in each State and Territory in order to develop machinery to implement such a process. [CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS 3.1, 3.2].

5.13 Information for Students

One direct means of assisting students to gain equitable access to tertiary places on a national basis is to provide information about options and the processes involved in determining eligibility and selection. Conference participants recognised the importance of this information being developed and made available widely. It resolved to ask MCEETYA to fund a sustained program to provide enhanced information to students about options available to them. [CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATION 1.8].

6. THE WAY FORWARD

The prime purpose of the Sydney Conference was to facilitate enrolment of students in tertiary education on a national basis while finding ways to enhance the equity of the processes involved in gaining places in courses in institutions generally and across State and Territory borders in particular.

The actions already agreed upon by the various agencies working in co-operation over recent years will continue to do much by refining the processes involved. The recommendations of the Conference, if taken up by MCEETYA and the other national and state agencies identified, will make a major contribution towards the development of a national system of the type proposed by Professor Pargetter.

The recommendations were, however, the end product of a conference procedure designed to elicit areas of consensus among the participants and, as such, they record only those actions and directions about which there was agreement without any significant opposition. The recommendations finally adopted reflect also the tendency, noted by Professor Pargetter in introducing his paper, of people who are specialists to see any compromise as a loss. There were many issues of significance discussed, many worthwhile proposals considered and many useful directions identified at the Conference but not taken up for lack of broad consensus.

The way forward would seem, therefore, to have two equally important paths to be pursued in parallel; vigorously following the gains already made and implementing the recommendations listed but at the same time pursuing at agency, State and Territory and national co-operative levels those other important issues identified.

The proposal put forward in Professor Pargetter's paper was supported in principle in terms of its general direction. If the various agencies whose representatives supported the proposal in principle now endorse that support they will need to work together to determine which particular aspects of the proposal are to be pursued and which are not.

A specific significant example of an issue raised at the Conference but still unresolved is the impact of the decision of the NSW universities to include a compulsory unit of English in that State's TER from 1996. Universities and admissions centres in particular, together with their national bodies will need to pursue this matter, identify clearly any effects on interstate eligibility and find solutions. There are other particular not-yet-agreed-upon items to pursue, such as the inclusion of vocational course marks in TERs.

There are, in addition, more general issues which should also be addressed. The central goal of the Conference was amended to relate to all tertiary, not merely to higher education. The tertiary role of TAFE and its relationship to higher education will need to be considered further. Many of the developments occurring in post-compulsory education and training generally and the problems identified by Judy Byrne in her paper may not seem to have much immediate relevance to boards, admissions agencies and higher education institutions yet they include some fundamental issues which will inevitably impact on every level and every sector of education in Australia.

We will need to follow the two paths through any secretariat and working parties which may be established but also on our own initiative in each of our States and Territory agencies, across those agencies and through our national co-operative organisations.

Sam Weller,
Chairman, ACACA

7. RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference gave in principle endorsement to the general directions of the proposal paper presented by Professor Robert PARGETTER. While some of the proposed recommendations were not acceptable to a minority of representatives (from particular sectors) there was overall support for the basic proposal of the Paper that there be a co-operative national system for tertiary admission rather than a single National Centre. There was agreement, without dissent, to many of the particular proposals designed to bring about a co-operative national system which is both effective and equitable.

The Conference recommends that ACACA (the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities) take the following action:

1. Request MCEETYA (the Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) to:
 - 1.1 Endorse the principle of a co-operative national system (as opposed to a single National Centre) for tertiary admission as outlined in the Pargetter paper.
 - 1.2 Encourage the use of multi-staged selection processes for tertiary admission.
and
 - 1.3 Provide funds for research into staged selection.
 - 1.4 Endorse the principle of each State and Territory moving to a TER of its own design (where this has not already occurred) and restructuring its own selection processes in terms of the use of this TE rank and/or other factors which may have course or institutional significance.

- 1.5 Encourage each State and Territory admissions centre and relevant TAFE authority to co-ordinate TAFE and higher education application processes where this has not already been done.
- 1.6 Endorse and facilitate the establishment of a working party to co-ordinate critical dates in the tertiary entrance processes.
- 1.7 Contribute funding for research to investigate the validity of the age-cohort method of matching notional TERs between States and Territories.
- 1.8 Fund a sustained program to provide enhanced information to students about options available to them both in their home States and nationally.
2. Request the AVCC (Australian Vice Chancellors Committee) and the NTCC (National TAFE Chief Executives Committee) to:
 - 2.1 Conduct a study into the impact of moving the start of the academic year back six months.
 - 2.2 Ask tertiary institutions throughout Australia to consider adjustments to the academic year in order to facilitate common dates and effective admission systems across the country.
3. Request ACHTAC (Australian Conference of Heads of Tertiary Admissions Centres) and individual admissions centres to:
 - 3.1 Investigate the implementation of staged selection processes.
 - 3.2 Set up a working party in each State and Territory where staged selection is not already in place, in order to develop machinery to implement such a process.
 - 3.3 Identify common data elements and coding structures for use on application forms.
4. Request ACHTAC in consultation with and agreement by State and Territory Assessment and Certification Authorities to:
 - 4.1 Agree that on an interim basis an age-cohort method for interstate comparisons of TERs should be adopted nationwide.
 - 4.2 Work towards a common offer data for all tertiary entry.
 - 4.3 Set a common offer data for university places for 1996 as 22 or 24 January.
 - 4.4 Provide a two week (minimum) space for all students to reconsider/change tertiary preferences.
 - 4.5 Aim to have school system results available before Christmas and accept the first working day in January as the latest date for availability.

8. RESPONSES TO THE DRAFT REPORT

Conference participants were asked to respond to a draft of this Report after consulting with the organisations they represented.

Twelve responses were received. Most responses offered general support for the outcomes of the Conference and for continuing efforts to provide less complex and more equitable access to tertiary education. Some suggested changes and corrections to particular aspects of the draft and several expressed criticism of the deliberations of the Conference itself and disagreement with some of the recommendations.

Comments and suggestions on editorial matters have been adopted where possible. Much of the comment in the responses received took the form of disagreement with the recommendations and/or deliberations of the Conference itself.

OBJECTIONS TO SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 2.

Request the AVCC and NTCC to:

- 2.1 Conduct a study into the impact of moving the start of the academic year back six months.
- 2.2 Ask tertiary institutions throughout Australia to consider adjustments to the academic year in order to facilitate common dates and effective admission systems across the country.

Two responses (from the one State) claimed that Recommendation 2 was not actually made by the Conference or that it 'attracted so little support that it should not proceed'. The conference facilitators, the recorder and several other participants had all noted, however, wide support for the recommendation, albeit with some dissent.

The above two responses, another from the same State, one from a different State and two from one Territory (six in all, including three from TAFE) all objected to the proposal in 2.1, generally stating that moving the academic year back six months would be difficult to implement and would seriously disadvantage students. One TAFE response stated the view that 'conducting an impact study into deferring the start of the academic year by six months would be a waste of time and money. Such a proposal has no merit from an applicant viewpoint'. A TAFE response from another State was that, 'The effect of (moving the start of the academic year back six months) would be patently disruptive and is clearly not worth the effort of setting up a study to establish this.'

The two responses from the one Territory critical of Recommendation 2.1 both suggested changing the school year, one suggesting starting in mid-January, the other, 'starting students in the school system six months later'.

Recommendation 4.

Request ACHTAC in consultation with and agreement by State and Territory Assessment and Certification Authorities to:

- 4.3 Set a common offer date for university places in 1996 as 22 or 24 January.

One (TAFE) response expressed concern that the delay of future offer dates for courses 'until late January or early February would be detrimental to applicants at a point in their lives when they are making difficult decisions about their future pathways. At such times applicants expect and deserve a decision about tertiary entrance sooner than later.' One university in the same State was 'very concerned that the proposals recommend the adoption of a national target period for 1996 offers that would substantially disadvantage the major client groups of (that State's) institutions', because it would reduce time for travel, arranging accommodation and employment changes by about a week. It concluded that, 'While the University supports moves to facilitate student mobility, it cannot support proposals that will seriously disadvantage major client groups for the sake of small-scale interstate movements and institutional convenience'.

4.4 Provide a two week (minimum) space for all students to reconsider/change tertiary preferences.

The tertiary entrance authority in the same State expressed concern about this recommendation as it considered that "approximately 10 days" would be more accurate than a two-week (minimum) and more consistent with the feeling of the Conference as expressed in paragraph 5.3 of the Report. The respondent considered that an acceptable solution would be to have at least a few days in common across Australia and asked that the following statement be included in the review of responses to the draft Report:

There is no particular reason why all major round offers should occur on the same date. The goal is for applicants to receive major round offers and have at least a few days to consider them all before having to accept or reject any. This means that the latest date for any major offer round must be no later than a few days before the earliest cut-off date for acceptance of a major round offer from any admissions centre. For 1996, 20 January could be suggested as the last date for major round offers in any State and 24 January as the earliest cut-off date for acceptances.

4.5 (aiming to have school system results available before Christmas)

This was seen by TAFE in one State as necessarily reducing the amount of time available for study in the HSC year, having an unfortunate impact on those students (in TAFE) completing the course in one year.

OTHER ISSUES OF CONCERN

Use of the Term, TER, the measure of overall achievement.

One respondent, noticing confusion during the Conference over the terms used for the major index for tertiary selection in each State, proposed that different terms be used. For raw, unadjusted scores/ranks he proposed, *Measure of Overall Achievement (MOA)* and for 'the outcome of the second step of the conversion process', the term, *Age-cohort TER*. While the distinction is appreciated, and noted here, a change in the record of the term(s) actually used by the Conference, and especially in the papers presented to it, would seem inappropriate.

Translations of entry scores across States and Territories

One response noted that the Report listed as one of the agreed targets, *Improved bilateral translations of entry scores between pairs of States or Territories*. The respondent considers that the suggestions 'made during the Conference that these translations should be transitive across all states and territories,' directly or indirectly, and not merely between pairs of States and Territories, should be recorded to help 'clarify the nature and intent of the translation process'.

Issues of particular concern to TAFE

A response from the TAFE authority in one State included in some detail an expression of major concern about issues which, the authority noted were 'not taken up in any serious way by the conference and (in some cases) seem to have been glossed over in the recommendations' of the Conference. Accordingly, 'The draft report of the Conference and particularly the recommendations of the Conference do not give sufficient attention to the issues raised by the TAFE sector' including the use of the TER in the vocational and training sector. The response illustrated this view by highlighting the dilemma of vocational courses and the TER. While it is clearly in the interests of students to have their vocationally oriented course results eligible for inclusion in the calculation of their TER the competency-based assessment now used for these courses is incompatible with the norm-referenced assessment used for other courses. The TAFE response suggests that there may be 'some value in establishing a national project to investigate the implications of competency based assessment for the design of TER scaling procedures' and 'further work at the national level ... on the use of evidence with respect to student achievement in non-academically assessed spheres of activity (including) the assessment and reporting of key competencies.'

APPENDIX 9.1

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

s 47F

Board of Senior Secondary School Studies
Queensland

s 47F

Western Australia Department of Training

s 47F

s 47F Assessment and Systems
NSW Board of Studies

s 47F

Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority
Queensland

s 47F

Vital Years Pty Ltd

s 47F

University of Tasmania

s 47F

Examinations and Assessment
NSW Board of Studies

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School of Education
Macquarie University

s 47F

s 47F ACT Board Senior Secondary Studies
Australian National University
Canberra

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Mr Gus Guthrie
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ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies

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Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia

s 47F

Higher Education Divisions, DEET

s 47F

Vital Years Pty Ltd

s 47F

NT Board of Studies

s 47F

The University of Melbourne

s 47F

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Board Services

Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia

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Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd

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Universities Admissions Centre
New South Wales

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SA DETAFE

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SATAC

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Assessment Certification Evaluation and Standards
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

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(Operations)

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s 47F

Canberra Institute of Technology

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Professor Robert Pargetter
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Secondary Education Authority - WA

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NSW Board of Studies

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s 47F Policy Analysis
Higher Education Division, DEET

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Board of Senior Secondary School Studies - Qld

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s 47F Examinations & Certification Branch
NSW Board of Studies

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Flinders University - SA

s 47F

NSW Board of Studies

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s 47F Student Admissions And Records
Monash University - Melbourne

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Mr Sam Weller
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Preparatory and Tertiary Entrance Programs
TAFECOM (NSW)

s 47F

- Policy
Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee

TOWARDS A NATIONAL TERTIARY ADMISSIONS SYSTEM

1) Background and Motivation

To assess a proposal requires some appreciation of the background to that proposal and of motivations for it. To discuss tertiary selection in a national context and to make proposals for change arises out of five not unrelated considerations.

The first is the political imperative perhaps best encapsulated by the Australian Education Council when they resolved to "endorse a conference of relevant senior representatives of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA), the Australian Conference of Heads of Tertiary Admissions Centres (ACHTAC), the National TAFE Chief Executives Committee (NTCC) and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) to consider and plan cooperative action to resolve any unnecessary and potentially unproductive differences in the collecting, reporting and processing of assessment data, and to consider the value and feasibility of any possible mechanisms for achieving a common reference system in relation to the transition of students from secondary education to TAFE and university study."

It is apparent that a general direction in the development nationally of the education system has been towards use of outcomes from a "final year at school" for selection to the full range of tertiary education. Another general direction has been the development of pathways to allow movement across the various sectors of the tertiary area. The resolution by the AEC is predicated on the continuation of these kinds of general movement, but goes further. It aims to facilitate equitable access, through simple procedures, for any student completing Year 12 in any state or territory, to tertiary institutions in any state or territory. Simply put it calls for a major rethink of the way in which applications by interstate and territory applicants are managed in Australia. It looks towards some common reference system that will ensure both equity and simplicity in application and process. Of course not all states and territories have yet adopted a single process for TAFE and Higher Education, so the resolution is certainly also predicated on uniformity in this regard.

Thus the simple fact is that there is political pressure for a more unitary selection system, and the pragmatic reality is that all states and territories are in fact currently moving clearly and rapidly in the direction of similar systems of tertiary selection, largely based on the outcome of the evaluation of a student's final year at school.

If there was any remaining doubt about this political interpretation, it has been put to rest by the Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Mr Simon Crean. In recent statements he has consistently supported the development of a National Tertiary Admissions Centre or a National Tertiary Admissions System with its intended delivery of simpler and more equitable processes to allow students to move across state and territory boundaries into tertiary institutions.

A second consideration in the background and motivation for this proposal, one with both educational and political elements, is the need to assist in the development of a culture where students seriously consider tertiary education "away from home", including away from one's own home state or territory. This is not, of course, completely new. Rural students and students who do not live in capital cities, have traditionally often made such moves, though the development of a unified national system of universities has somewhat reduced this need. But compared to other countries, particularly the UK and sections of the US college system, the numbers are small and the culture to move is not strong. Many have seen educational advantage in such movement, and its corresponding impact on student campus life. The costs to the student are higher, but the advantages for many are seen to be significant. To this educational advantage there is now a political one. With great attention now being given to the allocation of higher education resources, and their distribution across state and regional boundaries, one element in the response to uneven distribution, perhaps alongside some re-allocation of places, is the movement of students to locations where the human and physical infrastructures have been developed. But

to be effective this requires a more national approach to tertiary selection.

A third consideration is that it is likely that the unified national system may become less homogenous in the nature of its institutions and the range of its programs and special areas of expertise. If there is a diversification between the institutions in their approaches to higher education, to unique programs, to a more rational and limited range of programs at each institution, then students will need to be able to move to the institution where the course they want is offered. Yet this is only achievable if we can handle interstate-and-territory movement of students in an equitable way and by a simple and manageable process.

A fourth consideration is the pragmatics of the way in which interstate applications are currently handled by state and territory admissions centres. The number of such applications are still comparatively small but are growing. There is an increasing need to handle such applications well. Much effort is made to do this, but it is acknowledged that there are difficulties in dealing with those applications in a way that does not disadvantage the student either with the interstate application or with a concurrent home-state application. There is also a measure of approximation in judging equivalencies that is not to the applicant's advantage.

A fifth, and at this time final, consideration is the view that even if no new initiatives are taken to promote interstate and territory movement of students, the numbers will continue to increase, and perhaps dramatically increase. Students are starting to look at interstate and territory options, course and institutional specialisation is increasing, changes in approaches to the graduate-undergraduate divide are taking place. One example is movement by Flinders, Sydney and Queensland universities to offer medicine for graduate intake only. This could well have a very significant impact on applications for medical courses across state and territory borders.

These considerations are not exhaustive, and of course are closely related to each other. But enough has been said to set the context for our discussion. There is a need for a system of tertiary selection that allows students to apply for institutions across state and territory boundaries, that ensure they are treated equitably in their applications and that they are not disadvantaged in any other application by having made an interstate application, and also to ensure that the whole process is simple and open so that a culture of national application is encouraged and that students do not believe they are prevented by the process.

2) What is wrong with the present system?

The present system is that a student may make an interstate-or-territory application and that this application is treated equally alongside all other applications by the state or territory's admissions centre. The data used is based on the students' final school results, normally wholly or substantially Year 12 assessment data.

What is wrong with this sort of approach?

In the end I want to say "not much", but the situation is more nightmarish once the rest of the details are added. The significance of the details is that they do raise the question as to how a state or territory admission centre can give interstate applicants truly equitable consideration, how they can prevent a student from being disadvantaged in other applications, and how they can give applicants confidence in all the processes that are being used.

Let me mention some of these details:

- a) Results used are school results. Sometimes these results come directly from School Boards (eg Boards of Studies), sometimes from that State's Admissions Centre. Sometimes they come after calculation of an overall rank, sometimes in the form of aggregates of scaled scores from which a notional 'rank' is then determined, sometimes both are supplied.

- b) Consider the aggregates of scaled scores. Is the scaling comparable and is the input data for the home state scaling comparable? Can scaled results be considered 'equivalent to' scaled results in another state, and if not can an adjustment be made and in fact is an adjustment made?
- c) Suppose a rank comes. Is it a rank from the School Board or is it a rank from the home state or territory's admissions centre? Is the rank based only on the students' end-of-school results? Over how many years, and with what penalty for repeats, or for time taken? What factors other than end-of-school results enter into the rank? What about vocational studies? What about university studies taken at school?
- d) What is the cohort for the rank, that is what is the population that the student is ranked in?
- e) What is the fineness of scale for subject results, and for ranks? Where does 'rounding-off' occur?
- f) On what is the ranking based? On how many subject areas or studies? Are there any compulsory studies or are there spread of discipline areas requirements? Are there bonuses for extra subjects or designated subjects? Are there restrictions on combinations - how many LOTE's, how many maths? What penalties exist?
- g) Irrespective of the rank, does the student satisfy minimum tertiary entrance requirements in the relevant state or territory? (A recent example has a student on the 92nd percentile rank not satisfying another state's minimum entrance requirement.)
- h) Does the student have results or an academic profile additional to the end-of-school results? How do such results impact on rank, or how are they given reasonable consideration in the selection process? Does the student have results instead of the home state's normal end of school results (eg IB, vocational college)? How do such students receive reasonable consideration in the selection process?
- j) Once all these matters are known, how will the Admissions Centre evaluate an interstate applicant? Does it just provide the information to the course selection officer? Does it calculate a notional rank to give correspondence to in-state students? How is this done, does it include bonuses and penalties, how does it scale or adjust?

This list is of course just the beginning. But the issues raised here raise two questions. First the theoretical plausibility of being able to give interstate applicants due and equitable consideration. Can it really be done, given the great diversity in the current mix of systems across our states and territories? Secondly with such a diversity the student is in an impossible position with respect to choosing a rational strategy to be in a strong position for selection over a number of states and territories. For example, deciding on numbers of subjects, mix and choice of subjects, and distribution of effort over subjects can lead to a very good strategy for one state but a very bad strategy for another.

But there is another list of details of a pragmatic kind that perhaps are even more troublesome.

- k) Are the relevant results and information available to allow the timely consideration of the student for a first round offer in the course for which the student has applied?
- l) Has the student been able to change preferences, including interstate preferences, in the light of the final end-of-school results?
- m) Does the student have to make a decision concerning any first round offer that is prejudicial with respect to any other possible first round offer; or disadvantage the student in any way.
- n) Do requirements concerning pre-requisites, or information allowing the assessment of pre-requisites, disadvantage the selection of interstate students.

- o) Do requirements concerning attendance for interviews significantly disadvantage the selection of interstate students.
- p) Is an instate applicant disadvantaged with respect to second or later round offers of places by the practices by state or territory admissions centres or by tertiary institutions.

This list now seems overwhelming. We are probably amazed that any interstate student gets chosen for anything. Of course they do. Admissions centres and institutions go out of their way to give interstate applicants every consideration. The question that remains though is that surely we can do better and make the lives of instate applicants, admissions centres and tertiary institutions easier, and the system better.

3) **Two approaches**

There seems to be two ways to go.

We could make tertiary selection a national process, or we can address many of the difficulties faced within the present State and Territory based process.

I wish to urge the latter, and at the same time suggest that while this would not lead to a national tertiary admissions *centre*, it could lead to a national tertiary admissions *system*.

A National Tertiary Admissions Centre suggests:

- a single national agency to monitor and direct the tertiary selection process;
- a single application form covering universities and TAFEs nationwide;
- a single first-round (at least) offer in a preferential multi-round system.

Laudatory as such an achievement might be, I think realistic and pragmatic considerations make achieving such a National Centre extremely difficult.

Put aside the horrors of a new overlaying Federal bureaucracy across what is a relatively lean and effective network of state and territory admissions centres. What is more daunting is that to have a National Centre, virtually *all* of the problems of the existing system listed earlier would need to be solved, and all solved at once. Overcoming such problems would seem to be a *precondition* for establishing a National Centre.

If this is not daunting enough, I think there may need to be even more immediate national changes to make a National Centre credible

- there would need to be a completion of the integration of selection for the university and TAFE sectors;
- there would need to be an immediate acceptance of national curriculum frameworks to underpin secondary education, and for a fairly significant amount of detail in that framework for the higher secondary level;
- there would need to be cross state comparison of state and territory cohorts given the very great differences in those cohorts and the educational systems: perhaps a National GAT - a national general aptitude test to help equate different ranking systems.

I do not believe that all of those are particularly achievable in the short-term, putting aside the issue of whether they *should* be achieved.

If there are still some who cling to the goal of a National Admissions Centre, let me mention two other considerations.

State systems are already very complex. They allow preferences, change of preference, varieties of selection philosophies for courses at different institutions, campus preferences for the same course at an institution. These features are good for students and good for institutions. But they are complex, difficult to explain, and rely on a good deal of local knowledge. Imagine the increased complexity of a national application. A new order of magnitude in complexity, and a complexity to be mastered by all applicants.

Secondly, one very positive feature of the existing system at its best is the close relationship between the admissions centre and its *main* users, both tertiary institutions and secondary schools in the particular state or territory. A national system will lose these close connections, and correspondingly run the risk of a less tailored service to the main users. While it is an objective to develop better selection processes for interstate applicants it cannot be overlooked that the large majority of students in the foreseeable future will continue to choose locally. We must service this larger majority in the maximally efficient way, while catering better for the small but hopefully growing minority of interstate applicants.

Turn now to the alternative approach, a National Admissions *System*. Characterise this by the following features:

- maintenance of autonomous state-and-territory-based admissions centres, hence having multiple applications and multiple first round offers.
- an immediate move to address the problems listed above for dealing with interstate applicants, according to a timetable agreed to by state and federal authorities, with progress monitored by the Australian Education Council through a small secretariat.
- Continuation of the dialogue and the development of further operational agreements between Admissions Centres and increase formal operational arrangements with Boards of Studies to allow implementation of agreements, solving the problems and facilitating the processing of interstate-and-territory applications.

Given the difficulties with the National Centre approach, and the apparent attractiveness of the alternative system approach, surely the choice is clear. But this should not lead to relief and relaxation. There are some serious concerns that must be addressed with urgency for this approach to have a chance for future success. Let me present three:

- (i) There are some of the issues, most of which were listed earlier, that would need immediate attention in order to begin to achieve the aims of a national system. To achieve them requires determination by State, Territory and Federal Governments, and the co-operation of the State and Territory School Boards, Admissions Centres and TAFE bodies. These issues include
 - integration of TAFE and Higher Education into a single State or Territory system of tertiary admission where this has not already occurred;
 - co-ordination of dates for availability of school results, first round offers, acceptance of offers, and so on and so forth;
 - agreement by each state to move to a Tertiary Entrance Rank (of their own design) where this has not occurred, and to restructure their own selection processes in terms of use of this rank and other factors which may be course or institutional specific;
 - make some adjustment to the formal features of the various TERs to allow ranks to be more comparable across the states and territories, such as determination of the student cohort, the degree of fineness of the grade scales and TERs.
 - agreement by School Boards or Admissions Centres to provide with more refinement the data needed to other state and territory admissions centres to allow them to determine as accurately as possible notional TERS for the interstate-or-territory applicants.

- (ii) There would need to be quick resolution of present tension in some states concerning the nature of a TER and its acceptance by the higher education and the occupational training sectors. It seems clear that there will be a significant number of vocational units available in the senior secondary curriculum, and that a growing number of students should and will take these units. They cannot be asked to do a "heavier than normal" load of units in order to achieve a TER. We need institutions, particularly universities, to be generous about the basis of the TER with additional matters taken into account in selection by such requirements as pre-requisites and performance in pre-requisite subjects, while giving increased quality emphasis on their high out-put standards. To the extent that we have threats of university entrance exams, we are working in complete opposition of a real national admissions system.
- (iii) There needs to be a clear reply to the contention that the outlined system, a modification and coordination of the state and territory selection arrangements, is theoretically flawed and doomed to fail. It could be argued that unless we achieve a national curriculum and a national GAT, together with all the details needed for a national single TER, cross state and territory comparisons can never be achieved with sufficient degree of accuracy, even given that we may solve the pragmatic and other problems already identified as issues that must be immediately addressed. Hence the second approach is flawed and so, despite its horrors, we should accept the need for a National Admissions Centre if we really wish to have appropriate national arrangements for secondary to tertiary transition.

I think this reasoning is flawed. It rests on two unsustainable assumptions: one about the precision of the TER for each state or territory; the other about the use of the TER in the selection process in each state or territory. I will discuss these assumptions, and urge an alternative understanding of these matters.

4) **Accuracy and Precision in Ranks and Selection**

Take some particular state or territory.

Agree that the end-of-school subjects or studies are reasonably sophisticated in their curriculum aims and specifications in terms of skills and outcomes. Given our ability to measure these skills and outcomes, given the constraints under which we work, given the difficulty of moderating school and externally based assessment, given the difficulty of determining genuine authenticity, it would be a brave person that thought the possible error in each study's grade would not be at least 10%.

These results are then put through a complex system of scaling and calculation of a TER to produce a percentile rank. I find it very difficult to accept that this calculated rank would not have a reasonably likely error factor of at least $\pm 2\%$. I actually think that I am being extremely optimistic here.

Now there are three other factors linking the calculated rank with selection for a course

- a) How reliable is the calculated rank as an estimate of the real rank of the student in the cohort. Given my understanding of the scaling processes and the algorithms which calculate the rank in two states, I believe one must acknowledge a correlation much less than one, with the additional feature that the correlation decreases as the rank lowers.
- b) How good a correlation would there be between either the perfect or the calculated rank and success in the tertiary course? I again believe there must be acknowledgment that the correlation is much less than one, will vary between courses or programs, and will vary further as the cut-off rank decreases.
- c) Are there not factors not reflected in the rank which have good correlation with performance in the tertiary course? Here again most courses site considerations like performance in pre-requisite subjects and performance in practical areas as vital, while information about work experience, motivation and implication, personal qualities, issues relating to circumstances of disadvantage or background, and a detailed academic profile

are extremely helpful in supplementing the TER in the selection process to give more valid selection criteria, ie with better correlation with success in the course. It may be that a TER can be defined which incorporates more than just end-of-school results or it may be that these factors are considered at the institutional level or course level, or it may be a mixture of both. Generally though rank is not the whole story.

Putting all this together. A final ranking of applicants for selection should not just be determined by a TER. The TER has an error factor, and is not the whole story for selection anyway. The response should be then to see selection as a two-stage process. Some selection, perhaps up to 85%, can be selected on the basis of TER alone, but the last part of selection should involve consideration of more than the TER. This gives some method of responding to the error in the TER, its correlation with course success, and the importance of other factors.

The sizes of the two parts of the selection cohort should vary according to views about special factors in course success, and also to the reliability of a TER at the cut-off point for a course. In some cases the second part could be 100%, where an index of selection criteria is used as in the case of many TAFE courses.

It should be stressed that middle band selection, selection in the area where TER is not the sole ranking criteria, should not be seen as unstructured, inequitable, unquantified and subjective. There is institutional responsibility to ensure that this selection process is carried out according to agreed criteria and policy, with weightings for each specified criterion.

Now if this is a reasonable approach to selection, given the imprecision of TERs, and perhaps the only approach that is reasonable, it seems easily extendable to cover interstate applicants. If a notional TER is calculated, it will have an imprecision in equivalence to the home TER. The more work we do to address the problems we have discussed above, the less the imprecision, but an imprecision remains. But TERs are always imprecise and the worse case scenario is that a notional TER will have a slightly greater error than a normally calculated TER for that state or territory.

Hence if we widen slightly the middle band for interstate applicants, and make provision for consideration of the full range of middle band factors for interstate applicants, interstate applicants seem to be able to be reasonably handled within the selection process that seems appropriate for home state or territory applicants.

I conclude that there is no in principle problem with handling interstate applicants in a national system of tertiary admission based on a co-ordinated system of state and territory admissions centres.

5) **The Strategy in Summary**

If the objective is to have a national system of tertiary selection, particularly for selection based primarily on Year 12 assessment data, the best strategy seems to be to work within the existing framework of the selection procedures of the network of state and territory admissions centres.

It requires that some of these centres, with the support of the government, school boards, universities and TAFEs within that state or territory, move as many centres have already done to integrate selection for university and TAFEs, and to move to a single tertiary entrance rank for that state or territory. This will require, as other centres already can attest, some delicacy and balance in negotiating the specification of the TER, and determination of the role it plays in selection. The TER must not place undue requirements on students who take vocational or TAFE units within their Year 12 program, and at the same time must select adequately for academic programs. TAFE could use an index of selection criteria, in which the TER is but one factor, and the universities could use pre-requisites with perhaps specified grade requirements, to provide a way forward for both sectors who have reservations about a single TER based on Year 12 assessment data for a very broad higher secondary program.

Delicacy and balance may solve some opposition to the introduction and use of TERs, but it may be difficult to achieve TERs in all states and territories in the short term, given current ideological positions. While use nationally of TERs clearly aids the equity and simplicity objectives, alternative procedures could be used provided that they appropriately place the interstate-and-territory applicants in the ranking for selection in a manner that did not disadvantage any applicant. In a non-TER arrangement this will involve obtaining data far more extensive than that required to determine a notional TER.

The single most important element of the strategy is to bring about the coordination of data for Year 12 results, first round offers and other key selection and admissions occurrences. State and territory Admissions Centres and Boards of Studies cannot achieve this alone. The will to make it happen will require keen and active support from State and Federal governments, perhaps even to the extent of legislation, to ensure that the practicalities of a national system of tertiary admission are achieved. All entities and bodies involved must work to achieve the necessary arrangements, and good will probably will deliver the objectives. It is also important that all elements are brought into line at the same time. It would take key decisions now by the Australian Education Council to see arrangements in place for 1996.

Agreement is needed that an Admissions Centre will calculate a notional TER for that state or territory for each interstate applicant applying on the basis of Year 12 assessment data, and that Centres will establish a table of equivalencies for pre-requisite studies for use for interstate applicants and will in fact process interstate applicants with respect to pre-requisite requirements according to that table. Such an examination of pre-requisites may lead to a more uniform approach to pre-requisites for similar courses across the nation. This is also likely to require the support of State and Federal governments.

Modification of the specification of the various TERs to achieve more uniformity, and further development of services performed by a State-or-Territory Admissions Centre for determining notional TERs for other states and territories, could be more progressively achieved; as could more uniform curriculum frameworks to assist in a national specification of pre-requisite equivalencies. Realistically these may be achieved over the next three to five years. Such moves increase the accuracy of the calculation of national TERs, but in principle are not required to allow an effective national system to get under way. Notwithstanding this, quick agreement about required subjects for the TER and specification of the TER cohort would greatly increase the accuracy of notional TER calculation and simplify the arrangements required. There should also be an immediate move to establish agreement about minimum entrance requirements with the tertiary sector.

Ideally, if there could be complete agreement across all Admissions Centres concerning cohort and TER specification this may well lead to the reasonable acceptance of a TER from one state or territory as the notional TER for another.

The final piece in the strategy is to move nationally to a two-stage selection process. Each course could specify a percentage of places (somewhere between 0-85%) which will be determined by TER alone, including notional TERs for interstate applicants, plus satisfaction of pre-requisite requirements. Institutions, perhaps with the assistance of their Admissions Centre, would then select from "middle-band" applicants, the remaining 100-15%, using some specified index of selection criteria for that course. Minimally this should include consideration of the full academic profile of the applicant, particularly with respect to performance in pre-requisite subjects or studies, and special consideration due to circumstances of disadvantage. However, the criteria listed in the index could be far more extensive than this, covering folios, auditions, interviews, school profiles or reports, tests, work experience and other admission criteria. This second stage of selection acknowledges both the limited accuracy and predictive effectiveness of any TER, and also mitigates against any inequities that may have been introduced in calculation of notional TERs. A significantly expanded group of applicants should be considered in filling the second stage places, perhaps about twice the number that would have been considered if those places were determined by TER alone. Of course, this is the description of the selection of the "school leaver" component of the course intake, to be paralleled by arrangements for non-school leavers.

This strategy is not without flaws. It is driven by the combined imperative that we must meet the "national approach" requirement, and that the most obvious alternative is unacceptable. There may of course be other alternatives, but it must be clear that they are able to measure up against the requirements for a national approach for tertiary selection. I am sure there will be much tinkering with the suggested strategy. But it is a beginning. There is much work to be done according to this strategy, but it is shared work, and it is staged and manageable.

In all, it is a modest proposal.

Robert Pargetter
Monash University

RJP:jac
6 October 1994

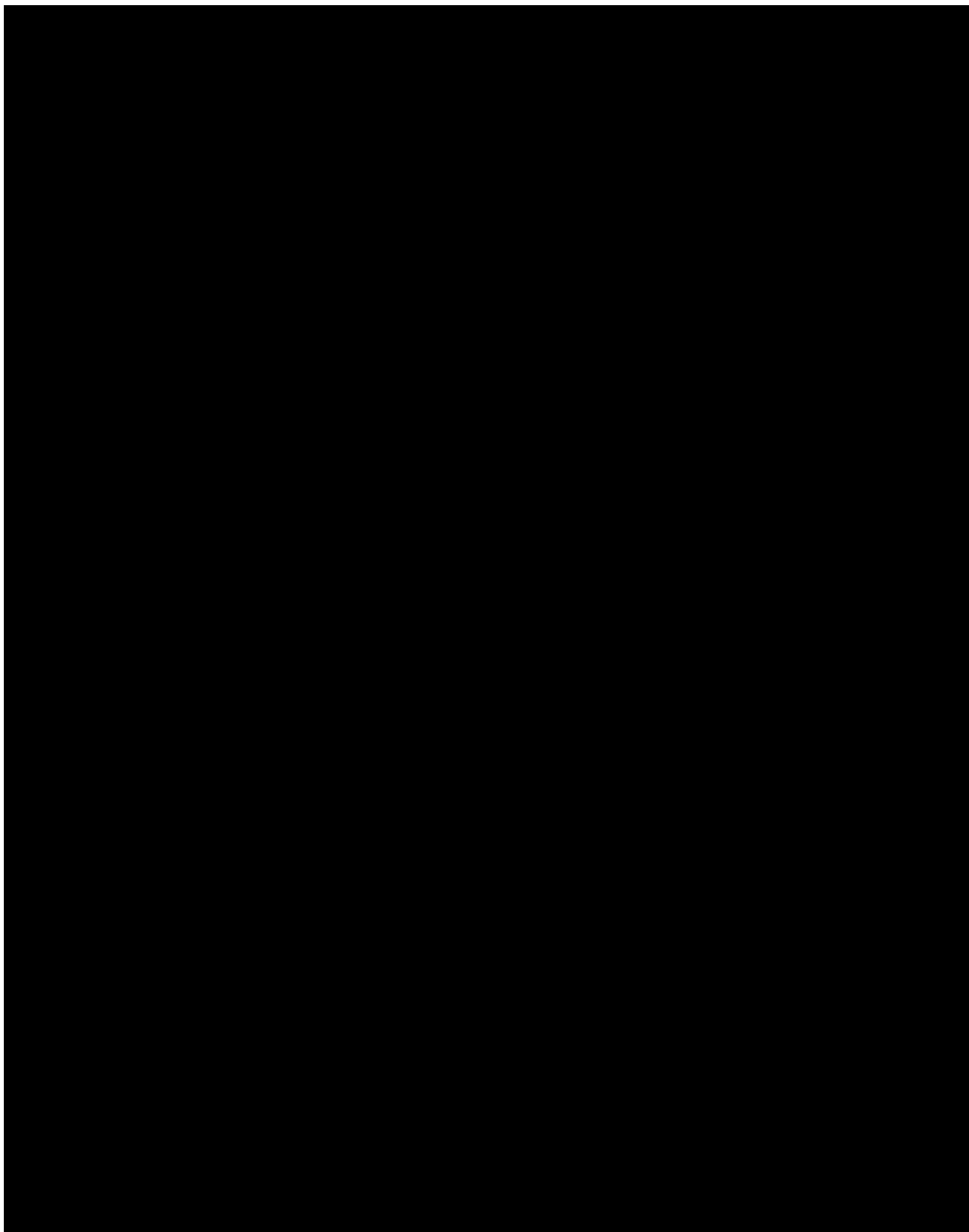
MC4 5.6 Report from Taskforce on an Australian Tertiary Admissions System

Council:

- a noted progress with work on the benefits of and options for further integration of the admission practices of the vocational education sector;
- b endorsed the use of the Common University Entrance (CUE) Index by tertiary admissions centres for determining interstate equivalences for university entry selection;
- c facilitated the implementation of the CUE Index approach to determining interstate equivalences between university applicants by authorising the Taskforce to establish a sub-group with the following terms of reference:
 - i. to oversee further work on the CUE Index;
 - ii. to develop and report on any other implementation details, ensuring close consultation with all relevant parties, including universities, tertiary admissions centres, schools and ACACA Agencies;
 - iii. to ensure the methodologies for deriving the CUE Index within each State/Territory are accepted as being soundly based, to liaise with the States/Territories concerning the methodologies and to report back to the Taskforce on those methodologies; and
 - iv. to report on supporting research activities and the collection of relevant data;
- d approved the composition of the sub-group as Professor Robert Pargetter (Chair), the Directors of the five State/Territory tertiary admissions centres, representatives of Tasmania,

Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory, and a representative from the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training and a representative from the school sector;

- e authorised the Chair of the Taskforce to advise higher education institutions, through the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, that they may need to alter their admissions statutes to include reference to interstate students and the use of the CUE Index;
- f noted progress toward common data and coding structures.



**Fourth MCEETYA Meeting
Adelaide, 8 December 1995**

Paper4/5.6/1

Agenda item 5.6

REPORT FROM THE TASKFORCE ON AN AUSTRALIAN TERTIARY ADMISSIONS SYSTEM

BACKGROUND

The May 1995 meeting of MCEETYA provided the following terms of reference to the Taskforce on an Australian Tertiary Admissions System. The Taskforce was charged with:

- "i. investigating the benefits of and options for further integration of the admission practices of the vocational education sector with the Australian Tertiary Admissions System
- ii. achieving the design of a research project that will lead to a methodology for calculation of interstate tertiary entrance rank equivalences
- iii. undertaking further work on the legal underpinnings of equivalence determinations, and on the equality of treatment for interstate applicants seeking admission without a tertiary entrance rank, through other entry points
- iv. reporting to MCEETYA on progress toward common data and coding structures."

To meet the first and second elements of its terms of reference, the Taskforce formed two sub-groups. Membership of these sub-groups is at Attachment A.

Each element of these terms of reference is discussed below. MCEETYA might also like to note progress with other aspects of the Australian Tertiary Admissions System:

- Tertiary admissions centres cooperated over a national advertising campaign in 1995 and have agreed that this approach should continue.
- The Australian Conference of Tertiary Admissions Centres has asked the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre to develop a national school leaver results data base, and the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (Western Australia) to develop a national Standard Tertiary Admissions Test results database.
- Tertiary admissions centres are developing a facility for exchanging academic records between member universities. This facility will eliminate the need for applicants to request their academic records from the individual university that they have attended.
- The Australian Conference of Tertiary Admissions Centres is coordinating the national development of an automatic telephone system (successfully implemented in Victoria in 1995), which it is hoped will enable students to make one telephone call to provide common application

data and list preferences for several States/Territories. Most tertiary admissions centres should be on this system for 1997 enrolments.

- Tertiary admissions centres decided to move the common closing date for applications to 27 September 1996, to accommodate a State which has a public holiday on 30 September.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

(i) investigating the benefits of and options for further integration of the admission practices of the vocational education sector with the Australian Tertiary Admissions System

The Taskforce's sub-group on vocational education met on 27 October 1995. The sub-group is examining:

- options for coordinating key dates for admissions to TAFE courses which do not occur through tertiary admissions centres;
- the possibility of States/Territories accepting each other's eligibility requirements for vocational education courses; and
- whether scope exists for greater commonality in admissions forms and procedures for vocational education courses.

In undertaking this work the sub-group will fully consider the position of States/Territories where admissions to TAFE are not made through tertiary admissions centres. The Taskforce expects to be able to report to MCEETYA on this element of its terms of reference early in 1996.

(ii) achieving the design of a research project that will lead to a methodology for calculation of interstate tertiary entrance rank equivalences

The Taskforce's report to the May 1995 meeting of MCEETYA noted that under current arrangements, the translation of a university entrance score in one State/Territory to the scale applying in another State/Territory is determined by a set of interstate equivalence tables that are developed by individual admissions centres. The basis of these equivalence tables differs between the States and Territories. At that meeting, MCEETYA accepted the Taskforce's recommendations that there should be a single national approach to the calculation of university entrance rank equivalences across the States/Territories for university intakes from 1997, and that an individual's rank in his/her own State/Territory will be the rank that is used to calculate his/her ranking in another State/Territory (the 'home State' rule).

The Taskforce recognises that the development of an empirically based translation methodology for comparing interstate results would be the most desirable procedure for establishing interstate equivalence rankings for the purposes of university entry selection. Unfortunately there are no current Australia wide data which could be used to underpin such a translation methodology. The Taskforce therefore believes that the most appropriate approach to this issue is to develop a procedure for establishing interstate equivalences that is defensible and fair to all students.

The Taskforce believes that the most fair and defensible procedure for establishing interstate equivalences is to relate the tertiary entrance scores applicable in a State/Territory to a common national scale; to be understood as a portrayal of the academic achievement of university applicants relative to their age cohort. The Taskforce has called this national scale the Common University Entrance (or CUE) Index. The specification of the CUE Index for a State/Territory involves relating the rank order of Year 12 candidates to the rank order of the relevant age cohort of the State/Territory in a way which is sensitive to differing rates of participation.

The CUE Index could then be used to generate a consistent, fair and defensible table of interstate equivalences if tertiary admissions centres agree to two requirements:

- If the CUE Index procedure is adopted, each tertiary admission centre would determine for its State/Territory the relationship of the rank order of Year 12 candidates to the CUE Index, as well as the relationship between the rank order of Year 12 candidates to tertiary entrance scores (this could involve 'banding'). Each tertiary admissions centres would therefore have to undertake to accept that the CUE Index positions proposed by tertiary admissions centres in other States/Territories specify the unique national rank of university applicants from that State/Territory (a corollary of the 'home state' rule for interstate equivalences).
- Tertiary admissions centres would have to agree to treat students moving into and out of their State/Territory symmetrically. Tertiary admissions centres would use the same formulae to relate the CUE Index ranks of interstate applicants (as specified by the home tertiary admission centre of the applicants) to their notional Year 12 candidature ranks, as they use to relate their Year 12 candidature ranks to the CUE Index.

Used in this manner, the CUE Index would establish a common national scale for determining the equivalence of tertiary entrance scores in one State/Territory to the tertiary entrance scores of any other State/Territory.

The Taskforce recognises that any portrayal of the relationship of tertiary entrance scores to rank positions in an age cohort depends on a number of assumptions about the definition of candidature, the appropriate age cohort and the percentage of the relevant age cohort who are Year 12 candidates at different age cohort ranks. The Taskforce also recognises that State/Territories might legitimately use different assumptions in determining the relationship of their candidature ranks to a portrayal of the rank order of students in an age cohort. The Taskforce has specified some minimum conditions (included in this report at Attachment B) which tertiary admissions centres ought to meet with their methodology for calculating their CUE Index. The Taskforce recognises, however, that more work needs to be done on the methodology to be used in the CUE Index. The Taskforce therefore proposes that MCEETYA endorse the establishment of a sub-group to undertake such work and to ensure that each State/Territory's methodology is generally accepted as being soundly based. This sub-group would also design a study to be undertaken at a later date to determine if the CUE Index is achieving its aims, and will encourage States/Territories to seek empirical data to support their calculation of the CUE Index. If MCEETYA approves the establishment of this sub-group, the Taskforce will finalise its membership and coopt members with technical expertise as required.

The Taskforce notes that making the calculations involved in determining the CUE Index available to university applicants would be a matter for States and Territories to decide. State/Territory tertiary entrance scores will not be affected by the establishment of the CUE Index. Entry selection procedures are a matter for individual higher education institutions.

(iii) undertaking further work on the legal underpinnings of equivalence determinations, and on the equality of treatment for interstate applicants seeking admission without a tertiary entrance rank, through other entry points

The Taskforce believes that the differences between the education systems of different States/Territories and the significance of selection processes for applicants mean that disputes over interstate equivalences may arise from time to time.

The Taskforce has sought advice on processes or agreements which could be used to minimise the likelihood of disputes. This advice indicated that two approaches are open to solving this problem.

- Higher education institutions could include a provision relating to interstate students which specifies the use of the CUE Index for interstate equivalences in their admissions regulations.
- A legislative approach could be adopted. Such an approach would involve either parallel legislation in each State/Territory or State/Territory legislation requesting that the Commonwealth to pass legislation on the matter. The legislation could specify an approach to admission of interstate students (possibly including reference to the use of the CUE Index) or prohibit appeals regarding admission to higher education institutions.

The Taskforce believes that a legislative approach to this issue is not practical, and that it would be preferable for the Chair of the Taskforce, working with the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, to contact universities about including provisions relating to interstate students in their admissions regulations. Though this approach would not guarantee that no disputes would arise, it would provide some protection for universities and tertiary admissions centres.

(iv) reporting to MCEETYA on progress toward common data and coding structures

The Taskforce's report to the May 1995 meeting of MCEETYA noted that all admissions centres have agreed to work towards a common set of data definitions for a core sub-set of the Higher Education Data Collection. Admissions centres have made considerable progress with the development of common data and coding structure for the relevant elements of the Higher Education Data Collection. The admissions centres will deal with any remaining issues as they refine their data collection procedures. The Taskforce will continue to monitor these issues and will report to MCEETYA on progress when necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Taskforce recommends that MCEETYA

1. note progress with work on the benefits of and options for further integration of the admission practices of the vocational education sector
2. endorse the use of the CUE Index by tertiary admissions centres for determining interstate equivalences for university entry selection
3. facilitate the implementation of the CUE Index approach to determining interstate equivalences between university applicants by authorising the Taskforce to establish a sub-group with the following terms of reference:
 - i. to oversee further work on the CUE Index;
 - ii. to develop and report on any other implementation details, ensuring close consultation with all relevant parties, including universities, tertiary admissions centres and schools;
 - iii. to ensure the methodologies for deriving the CUE Index within each State/Territory are accepted as being soundly based, to liaise with the States/Territories concerning the methodologies and to report back to the Taskforce on those methodologies; and
 - iv. to report on supporting research activities and the collection of relevant data

4. approve the make-up of the sub-group as Professor Robert Pargetter (Chair), the Directors of the five State/Territory tertiary admissions centres, representatives of Tasmania, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory, and a representative from the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training
5. authorise the Chair of the Taskforce to advise higher education institutions, through the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, that they may need to alter their admissions statutes to include reference to interstate students and the use of the CUE Index
6. note progress toward common data and coding structures

**SUB-GROUPS OF THE
TASKFORCE ON AN AUSTRALIAN TERTIARY
ADMISSIONS SYSTEM**

**Sub-group on the benefits of and options for further
integration of the vocational education sector with the
Australian Tertiary Admissions System**

s 47F

(TEPA Qld)

s 47F

(DETAFE, SA)

s 47F

(WA Department of Training)

s 47F

(ANTA nominee)

**Sub-group on the design of a research project that will lead to
a methodology for calculation of interstate tertiary entrance rank equivalences**

Professor Robert Pargetter (Vic) Chair

s 47F

(NSW)

s 47F

(WA)

s 47F

(Qld)

s 47F

(Vic)

s 47F

(NSW)

s 47F

(SA)

s 47F

(Qld)

s 47F

(ACT)

The sub-group circulated a discussion paper '*A proposed strategy for comparing interstate university entrance ranks*', in September 1995. Responses to this discussion paper were discussed by the Taskforce at its meeting on 27 October 1995.

**PARAMETERS OF AN ACCEPTABLE METHODOLOGY
FOR DETERMINING INTERSTATE EQUIVALENCES
FOR THE PURPOSES OF UNIVERSITY ENTRY SELECTION**

The candidature

It will be necessary for each state to clearly define the criteria used to determine the group of students in the defined age cohort who are assigned the state's tertiary entrance score. If the final positions on the CUE Index are to be comparable, these definitions will need to be comparable or the assumptions made about non-participants adjusted to compensate for any differences.

Since the basis of the CUE Index is relative achievement, the candidature rank assigned to each student by the home state should not be unduly influenced by the amount of study undertaken, subject to a minimum amount being done. The aggregate score underlying the ranks should be calculated from a 'standard package' defined for each State/Territory. Subject scores should be appropriately moderated and/or scaled to reflect the relative achievements of different subject candidatures. Students who take more than the standard package may be allowed to retain their best scores. Students who take less than the standard package (partial students), but who are accepted by the State/Territory concerned as candidates, should have their aggregates scaled-up to the equivalence of the standard package. Discounts for the beneficial effect of reduced study could also be applied.

Students who accumulate their package over more than one year should be treated as partial students until they have achieved the necessary minimum package. Repeat students may have discounts applied in determining the home state rank.

The age cohort

Age cohorts should be based on the latest relevant official statistics produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It is suggested that the appropriate figures would be the current year's estimates from the ABS.

The methodology used should consider the age distribution of the candidates, the State/Territory residence of the candidates and the extent of participation of the State/Territory's residents in the system in other states.

The candidature rank

The basic assumption of this approach is the comparability of cohorts of Australians. For this reason, international students should be excluded initially from the candidature ranks and, after the CUE Index translation is established, then given ranks equivalence to their performance compared with other candidates.

The candidature rank for each Australian student should be based on a single aggregate of scaled scores. Where more than one aggregate is used within a State/Territory, the aggregate used to produce the CUE Index should be that used for the university entry of the largest number of students in the State/Territory. The scale used should be the one normally used within the State/Territory.

Fineness of scale

It is suggested that the translation process within each State/Territory retains maximum accuracy. Each State/Territory has the right to band students for their tertiary entrance scores.

The translation methodology

It is proposed that the methodology to be used by any State/Territory explicitly show the assumptions being made about the relative abilities of Australian candidates and non-candidates. This should be in the form of a graph or table showing the participation rate of students at various levels of the CUE Index. This graph (or table) would, ideally, be based on empirical evidence and/or arguments involving factors such as:

- the total participation rate of Australian students;
- the nature of the candidature;
- patterns of non-participation (eg employment alternatives, the use made of measures of ability to chose students to continue to Year 12, the extent of mature age schemes and/or accumulation schemes, etc.);
- the definition of the age cohort.

Whatever basis is used to determine the graph (or table) it would be expected to have the following features unless a case is made as to why the feature is not present:

- (i) A candidature participation rate of 100% for at least the top 40% of the candidates;
- (ii) A candidature participation rate of 0% at the bottom end of the CUE Index;
- (iii) An increasing rate of candidature participation at increasing CUE Index points;
- (iv) The area under the graph as a proportion of the total area must be the total candidature participation rate.