

**Submission No. 8**  
**Chritina Scaife**

I would like to outline a little known process about which there is very little public disclosure or comment. It is known as the SLIP BACK OFFER SCHEME – which is an activity carried out by UAC (University Admission Centre) in NSW on behalf of NSW universities.

What happens with this scheme is that UAC writes to students who previously applied to university but did not qualify for entry (UAC has all of the students names and contact details due to their earlier university application) and advises them that – ‘although they did not qualify to enrol in the course they applied for, ‘Congratulations, you have been made a slip-back offer from SuchAndSuch University College where you can undertake a diploma course’. These diploma courses, do not guarantee the students progression into a university degree, nor do they provide any credit towards a degree program should the student be accepted into a degree program later. Some of these University Diploma are under the AQF (which means that the diploma qualification will be recognised by other higher-education providers), and some are only recognised by the university in which they complete the diploma (which means if they do go to university later, they can only go to the university where they undertook the diploma). An AQF qualification is nationally recognised and is portable between training providers.

The problem is that students who receive this ‘official letter on UAC letterhead’ - are under the mistaken impression that they have ‘got into uni’ – and they are excited about that. They don’t understand that UAC is owned by the universities – and that UAC is actually acting as a marketing agent for the universities. Some of these students have already enrolled at an RTO and in some cases they have already commenced their course with the RTO – but on receipt of the UAC letter they withdraw from the RTO and take up the university offer. This has happened many times at Bedford College and I am aware that other RTOs are having the same problems. I understand that the process between UAC and the various university colleges – is that the universities advise UAC on how many slip-back places they want to fill and UAC finds the students to fill them.

The problem with this is that many (most) of these students are not capable of completing a university degree; they are set up to fail. They commonly do not have the academic ability to undertake a degree and are not provided with the support and assistance that’s available through a reputable RTO - which commonly has much smaller class sizes and personal attention to each student. When the student completes their university diploma course (if they do) they will commonly have only a debt to show for their time there. University colleges do not seek employment for their diploma students nor liaise with them in achieving work throughout their course, nor assist them into articulating into a university degree – if that’s what they want. RTOs do all of that.

There has always been a place for higher education students and another for vocational education students. It makes no sense for UAC and the universities to make offers to students who have effectively failed to gain entry through the normal means i.e. their ATAR, bonus points, etc. (although that’s another problem). Students who are made a slip-back offer have generally achieved a low ATAR which would not get them into a university (although I am aware of universities enrolling students with an ATAR of 19 (as per the interview with Mr Picolli that appeared in the SMH on 18 February this year).

Students who enrol in university should possess the academic ability and the motivation to undertake and satisfactorily complete a degree program. It's not fair to take their money when there is little chance of them achieving a satisfactory results and a successful employment outcome.

I also wish to mention that at a recent VET Fee-Help consultation meeting with the Minister for Vocational Education and Skills, Senator the Hon Scott Ryan – a TAFE representative stood up and advised the minister that it's 'not the shonky training providers that are destroying TAFE, it's the universities with their unethical offers to students who are absolutely incapable of satisfactorily completing a degree)'. This needs to be addressed.

Kind regards

***Christina Scaife***

Principal/CEO

Bedford College

*Glebe Campus* - 54 Parramatta Road, Glebe NSW 2037

*Norwest Campus* – 2 Columbia Court, Baulkham Hills NSW 2153

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