

Submission No 16

Submission responding to
*Consultation on the Transparency of Higher Education
Admissions Processes*

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Prelude

1. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the paper.
2. Because of the lateness of our submission, the comments incomplete.

Principles

3. With the exception of principle 2,

All students, no matter what their backgrounds, should have the same knowledge of how admissions arrangements work,

we support the proposed principles articulated under the heading “Proposed Principles”. We recommended that principle 2 be reworded or removed. The reason for this suggestion is because the appearance of word “should” in Principle 2 makes little sense. It is plain that it cannot hold its usual meaning as a synonym for “must”. If it did, then the principle would be perverse, requiring a test of students' knowledge before they were allowed to engage in further education! Besides, unlike the word “should” in every other principle, the word in principle 2 appears to impose a duty on students instead of imposing a duty or obligation on universities or government. The Higher Education Standards Panel is tasked with regulating universities including regulating what universities do to *influence* (eg by teaching) whatever happens in the minds of students; but it is not tasked with the physically impossible such as regulating the mind of students. Our preference is to see Principle 2 deleted. At the very least, it should be reworded to make plain its status as “ambition” (sometimes called “goal”):

It is preferable that all students, no matter what their backgrounds, should have the same knowledge of how admissions arrangements work,

Response to Question 1

4. In asking “what is the most important information needed to help potential higher education students determine which course to study and which institution to apply for” the Panel should recognize that there are a great many students whose long-term interests may be best served by *not participating* in higher education. These students include the many who have been hoodwinked by well-meaning but misguided rhetoric over the decade to think university-based education is the only valid choice for a young person leaving secondary school. It includes also the many students who will be better served by undertaking TAFE-based vocational training or an apprenticeship.

5. If a student determined to go to university, we suggest the most important information they can get is information to tell them how good is the fit between their individual personal attributes (smarts/intelligence, subject interest, determination, self-motivation, capacity to reason, capacity to delay reward, financial goals, career goals) and characteristics of the courses (course difficulty, expected learning outcomes, reliance on self-directed learning versus hand-holding).
6. **Student review, institutional reputation and other non-objective data.** We feel sure that student reviews and surveys are likely to figure highly in the opinion of many, yet available evidence indicates that student ratings of course quality have very low, and sometimes negative, associations with learning outcomes. This leads to our suggestion that if potential applicants are to be provided with data (to contrast with genuine *information*) about student-ratings, institutional reputation, etc then they must also be told how unreliable is the measure of these attributes. They must also be told how much or how little these attributes associate with objective learning outcomes.

Response to Question 3

7. We urge the Panel not to try to standardize the award of so-called “bonus entry points” by universities. This is based on there existing no serious research to show the bonus point approach is fair. To particularize this, no studies examine, leave alone demonstrate, that two students whose post-bonus-point entry scores are equal but who get their bonus points by different paths (such as by ancestry, suburb of residence, geographical location, prior work experience, etc) have objectively equal probabilities of attaining any given grade. Without this demonstration, the only verifiable effect of bonus points is to make the entry system even more unfair.

Response to Question 6

8. We support a more coordinated national approach to admissions. We also suggest that the Australian government encourage the approach but not require or regulate it.

Response to Question 10

9. The authors suggest Question 10 should not be pursued because takes as its starting point an improper premise. The Panel should first clearly articulate the objective basis on which it *can* be determined that an individual, or even a group of individuals has *actually been disadvantaged*. If you look closely, you can see that current equity criteria do not do this.