
Submission: The University of Notre Dame Australia
Higher Education Standards Panel
Consultation on the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions Processes

The Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) has identified ten principles that should underpin its advice to the Minister. The University's feedback has been organised under each of the principles below, grouping principles together where appropriate. Where an example can be provided from the series of questions posed in the Consultation Paper, this has been done.

1. A student-centred approach to transparency should be central to any solution.
2. All students, no matter what their backgrounds, should have the same knowledge of how admissions arrangements work.
3. The broad autonomy of institutions over their admissions policies should be accepted, providing that these policies are compliant with the Higher Education Standards.
4. The revised Higher Education Standards (HES), which will take effect from 1 January 2017, should provide the operating framework: they contain clearly articulated requirements in relation to admissions transparency, the provision of information for prospective students, and the quality of learning environments.

All principles are supported. It is important that all compliance standards are captured within the Higher Education Standards (HES).

In this regard, we provide the following **comment on Q: 3 and 6 in the Consultation Paper as an example – *Should the application of 'bonus points' be more consistent across institutions? Would a more national approach to managing applications across borders be beneficial?***

Neither should occur. Principles 3 & 4 above both relate to the how of Admissions Policy and the locus of decision making (autonomy). The principles and HES clearly articulate this to be the domain of individual universities. Any attempt to force consistency across institutions at an operational level or establish a national approach, will be in conflict with the principles. Not all institutions will use 'bonus points' and those that do will develop a model that responds to their unique context. This is appropriate. The relevant outcome is that there is clarity in the process and transparency in the factors used by each university, not conformity across the sector.

5. Any new requirements or changes should apply equally to all higher education institutions, universities and non-university higher education institutions alike.

Supported – however how this is enacted will be important. The University does not support the establishment of a secondary list of requirements outside the HES. If there are requirements on universities, then they should be incorporated in the HES. Further,

the new HES that comes into effect on 1 January 2017 should be allowed sufficient time for implementation and review of impact before additional requirements are added.

6. Consistently presented and comparable information on all entry pathways and requirements should be available for each institution by discipline or by course.

The University supports the ideal of comparable information being made available provided it is done in such a way to honour principle 3 and allows each institution appropriate flexibility in 'how' the information is presented.

In this regard, we provide the following **comment on Q: 1 in the Consultation Paper - ... what is the most important information needed to help potential higher education students determine which course to study and which institutions to apply for?**

This will be different for each individual student, however, some of the relevant considerations include:

- I. **Institution level information** – institutional mission, institution reputation, campus facilities, student welfare support, student learning support, student and campus-life activities, opportunities for work integrated learning, overseas study opportunities, graduate employment and earning outcomes, student reviews of teaching quality, etc. Much of this is already adequately available through the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) website as well as individual university websites.
- II. **Course level information** - prerequisites, ATAR cut-offs, entry options or requirements, other non-Academic criteria, possible career pathways, registration standards to enter the profession and complete practicums (eg. Working With Children requirements), length of course, mode of study, course cost, accreditation of a course by a professional body or association.

We also provide the following **comment on Q: 10 in the Consultation Paper - What special measures are needed to ensure equity of access for disadvantaged students?**

Flexibility in an Admissions system, specifically to deal with such circumstances, is required. It may be difficult to make more transparent those practices that have been established to take particular account of an applicants' individual circumstances particularly where a form of disadvantage has been identified. There are also individual privacy considerations. Care will need to be taken to ensure that pathways for disadvantaged students, who are often the recipients of decisions based on individual circumstances, are not diminished through this process.

7. A guide to admissions policies and student enrolments should be made available through a single online platform for ease of access.

A 'Guide to Admissions' would appear an appropriate resource. Whilst an online provision is likely to be the outcome even without mandating, this again goes to the how of implementing the HES & therefore should be a decision taken by the individual university in response to its context.

8. Universities Australia and other higher education peak bodies should publicly support clarity on how ATARs scores are used and the manner in which alternative admissions pathways and policies are applied.

9. It should be made clear that ATAR thresholds do not operate as a strict 'cut-off'; that thresholds generally apply to (bonus point) adjusted ATARs; and that prior year ATAR thresholds are provided only as a guide to prospective students.

Both supported. Universities Australia has already released a Statement to this effect.

In this regard, we provide the following **comment on Q: 11 in the Consultation Paper – Can you suggest any other changes that would improve public awareness and understanding of tertiary admissions processes?**

It needs to be recognised that default language implying that admission on the basis of ATAR is the norm for domestic students and that other bases of admission are exceptional (which is not the reality), is not helpful. This will require a strategy to engage/educate the media as well as school level advisors. The data provided in the Discussion Paper clearly indicates this pathway to university applies to less than 50% of students. In the case of this university, ATAR is only one component of a broader holistic perspective. No student is admitted on the strength of ATAR alone.

It should not be assumed that knowledge about how the ATAR rankings are calculated and about published 'cut-off' thresholds is a significant influencing factor for prospective students in their course decision. The extent of the issue should be tested with a sample of students.

10. Higher education institutions should be held accountable for public claims against their stated entry policies.

It is not clear what this statement intends or how it contributes to a positive discussion about improving transparency. Universities are already accountable under existing laws for claims against stated policies.