

Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres (ACTAC)

SUBMISSION

Response to the Higher Education Standards Panel's
*Consultation on the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions
Processes*



Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres

BACKGROUND

The Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres (ACTAC) was established in the 1970s and is the group that facilitates communication and co-operation between tertiary admissions centres in Australia and New Zealand.

The five members of ACTAC are:

- Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC, servicing Queensland)
- South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC, servicing South Australia and the Northern Territory)
- Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC, servicing Western Australia)
- Universities Admissions Centre (UAC, servicing NSW and the ACT)
- Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC, servicing Victoria)

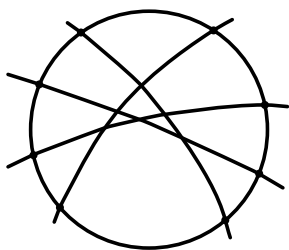
The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the University of Tasmania also participate in ACTAC meetings.

UAC's Managing Director is the current Chair of ACTAC.

ACTAC supports the education sector and the government to make better decisions, develop clearer policy and achieve improved public outcomes, via the provision of impartial information and insights about student admissions obtained through its extensive data and sector relationships developed over many years.

ACTAC is in an excellent position to support the government and education sector in achieving excellent outcomes for prospective students through a national approach to national issues, while the state-based members of ACTAC will continue to provide local solutions for local issues. Particularly, ACTAC can improve transparency of admission-related information while supporting light but effective regulation.

ACTAC welcomes the work of the Higher Education Standards Panel in seeking to improve the transparency of higher education admissions processes. ACTAC is keen to be seen as a trusted and valued adviser on national admissions and related issues, and can provide options for supporting whatever policy is the outcome of the Panel's recommendations to government.



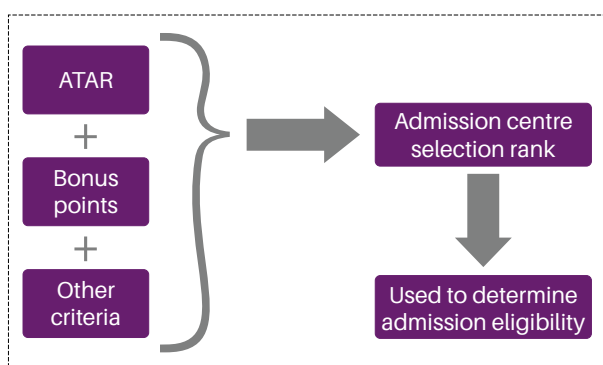
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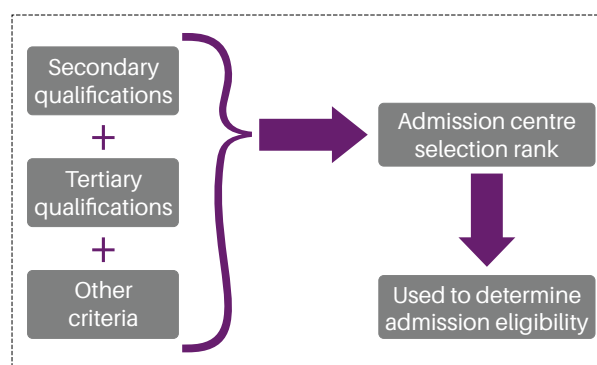
Admissions processes across Australia

The basis of the Australian admissions process is the selection rank. This is a number (like the ATAR) that is calculated for each applicant for each of their course preferences. For Year 12 students, it may be the ATAR alone, or it may be the ATAR plus bonus and other points, or it may be a number derived from other criteria (such as performance at an audition or interview, ATSI status etc). For non-Year 12 students the rank is usually derived from a mix of criteria such as Year 12 results, other qualifications (such as a TAFE Diploma) and even employment experience. The following graphics illustrate how the selection rank may be derived for Year 12s and non-Year 12s.

Year 12 selection rank



Non-Year 12 selection rank



There is a misconception in the community, and even in some pockets of government and the sector, that all university admissions are based on ATAR. Clearly, this is not the case. Many applicants are not coming directly from Year 12 and may not have an ATAR or even an equivalent to it, and even for Year 12s ATAR is not the only criteria used. The selection rank is the basis of the admissions process, and it can have a number of inputs.

This system has been in place for many years, and the state-based tertiary admissions centres have provided consistent information to schools and students about this system.

While there is nothing new about the concept of the selection rank, for Year 12 students there has been a shift in recent years in terms of the percentage of students being selected on more than just ATAR. While 10 years ago for most Year 12 students their rank would have been simply their ATAR, now for most Year 12 students their rank is their ATAR plus bonus points or other criteria. This reflects the growth in bonus points and other schemes at universities during those years.

Key responsibilities and capabilities of ACTAC

ACTAC provides national co-ordination of key admissions processes across Australia. ACTAC members have significant state networks that facilitate these processes, and are the source of data and impartial advice to their local stakeholders.

At the national level, ACTAC is responsible for administering the National Tertiary Admissions System, which promotes consistency between states in university admissions.

In 1995 the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MYCEETYA) accepted a report from its taskforce on a national tertiary admissions system which established core elements of a national system, which are detailed below along with other functions co-ordinated by ACTAC that underpin the successful operation of the national system.

Common dates

- The last working day in September for the submission of on-time applications.
- Agreed dates in January for the publication of, and response to, Main Round offers such that applicants who have applied in more than one state/territory are not required to respond until all main offers have been made.

Release of Year 12 results

The agreed latest target date for release of results to students was set at the first working day of January. The purpose of this element is to ensure a reasonable period for applicants to change their preferences prior to Main Round offers. Results are released in all states/territories, as a matter of course, in December.

National approach to the calculation of measures of overall achievement across states

This methodology, which is based on the relationship between a rank in the whole population and the probability that an individual is a candidate, was adopted by the taskforce in May 1997 and is formally monitored by a national group of technical experts reporting to ACTAC.

It means that an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) in one state is treated as equivalent in other states. So, for example, an ATAR of 70.00 in NSW is treated as 70.00 in all other states.

This group has also developed for ACTAC a common table for converting IB results into local measures of overall achievement.

Eligibility of interstate applicants

The notion of 'home state rule' was adopted meaning that if an applicant meets minimum tertiary entrance requirements for all institutions in their home state/territory they will meet minimum tertiary entrance requirements for all interstate Australian institutions subject to ATAR/selection rank and individual course requirements.

Admissions centres refer to tables of interstate subject equivalents so that interstate applicants are not disadvantaged where institutions have established prerequisites at course level. Some centres also include subjects completed interstate in local measures of overall achievement calculations where appropriate arrangements have been made with certifying authorities to convert those subjects into local scores.

ACTAC also monitors annually the application rates of interstate Year 12 applicants, which have been found to be relatively constant over a long period of time. (In Australia, the vast majority of Year 12s seek application to universities within their home state.)

Exchange of Year 12 results

Each state and territory's Year 12 results and overall measures of achievement are annually transferred to a national database so that current and prior year applicants can be automatically considered without any action required by individual interstate applicants.

Exchange of university transcripts

A national system of automatically accessing university databases and transferring tertiary records for non-Year 12 applicants has been in operation since 1996/97. This system is known as the Automated Results Transfer System (ARTS).

Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT) national database

A national database of STAT results has also been established. These results are primarily used to adjudge the ability and potential of mature-age applicants without formal qualifications. These tests were developed by ACER for admissions centres.

Current projects

Student data portability

ACTAC is currently working on a project to extend academic record portability, in line with the growing interest in digital student data portability in the Australian higher education sector following the signing of the Groningen Declaration in May 2015 by Universities Australia on behalf of Australian institutions.

ACTAC is already the leading body in student data portability in Australia. As noted, ACTAC developed and administers the Automated Results Transfer System (ARTS), which allows the exchange of digital student records between institutions and tertiary admissions centres for the purpose of admission to university.

ACTAC is developing an extension of the functionality of ARTS to further support student mobility. ACTAC is ideally placed to develop and maintain a solution that will make digital student data available to individual students and other third parties on behalf of the sector.

Teacher education requirements

ACTAC members are working together to provide consistency and transparency of information in relation to national teacher education requirements. While many admissions requirements are state- and institution-based, ACTAC has oversight of any measures that require a common national approach.

Statement of support

ACTAC supports the work of the Higher Education Standards Panel in looking at the transparency of university entry criteria. The five ACTAC members have been, and continue to be, actively involved in partnering with universities to provide information to students, schools and the public about university entry.

In addition, ACTAC is well-placed to report on how students have been admitted into courses across Australia.

Tertiary admissions centres have a wealth of data about university admissions criteria and offer outcomes. The admissions centres would be able to work together to report this data on a national basis to clearly show a range of factors such as the proportion and number of offers made to Year 12s based on ATAR, ATAR plus bonus points and other (non-ATAR) criteria. This data could also detail the minimum and maximum ATARs accepted for each course, and the quartiles into which the distribution of successful students fell, along with other metrics that would be both meaningful and helpful to prospective students and the general public.

Therefore the suggestion that there could be an annual report of this nature is welcomed by ACTAC members. ACTAC could co-ordinate the publication of national data in whatever timeframe and in whatever format thought fit by the government and the sector.