

Submission No 64


# INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO HESP CONSULTATION ON THE TRANSPARENCY OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS PROCESSES

CQUniversity

*May 2016*



BE WHAT **YOU** WANT TO BE  
[cqu.edu.au](http://cqu.edu.au)



The following are CQUniversity's institutional responses to the questions posed by the Higher Education Standards Panel in its recent paper *Consultation on the transparency of higher education admissions processes*.

1. *Based on your experience, what is the most important information needed to help potential higher education students determine which course to study and which institution to apply for? Please feel free to rank the different types of information in order of importance.*

Applicants to Australian universities must locate and interpret a number of important information sources in order to make informed decisions about their preferred course(s)/institution(s) of study. These include, in no particular order:

- Entry requirements (English language competency, prerequisite subjects, minimum rank, other requirements such as interview)
- Institution admissions policies
- Course accreditation/registration requirements
- ATAR/OP “cut offs”
- Slipback/pathway/upgrading opportunities
- Course location and study modes
- Class size
- Access to student feedback on courses and institutions
- Work placement initiatives
- Financial support
- Cost of study

2. *Is knowledge about how the ATAR rankings are calculated and published ‘cut-off’ thresholds a significant influencing factor on course and institution preferences?*

In our experience, applicant knowledge about the calculation of ATAR/OP rankings is limited, and published “cut offs” are a significant influencing factor. Published “cut offs” serve to shape the expectations and behaviour of a prospective applicant in making a decision on whether or not to apply to a particular course/institution. While the publication of this information does assist applicants in understanding prerequisites and selecting appropriate senior school subjects, it does need to be transparent so that the applicant can calculate their own likely score and then preference their course selection in a logical order.



**BE WHAT YOU WANT TO BE**  
**cqu.edu.au**

*How could this information be made more accessible and useful?*

As each state differs in its methodology of ATAR calculation, ranking criteria is not readily understood by all applicants and becomes confusing when applicants are looking to cross state borders. In addition, non-school leavers struggle to understand how their qualifications will translate to entry to a course. A centralised online platform covering all Australian institutions, explaining ATAR/OP ranking calculations with multiple examples to demonstrate the process, would provide greater transparency for applicants.

3. *Is there sufficient information about how 'bonus points' are awarded and used to adjust 'raw' ATARs sufficiently understood? Should the application of bonus points be more consistent across different institutions? Is the current variety of different bonus point rules appropriate to meet the needs of individual students and institutions?*

This is an area that needs review as there is a lack of transparency across the sector. In some cases, it is arguable that bonus schemes are used to mask "true" entry cut offs (ATAR/OP) and this practice is becoming more widespread. Institutions utilising bonus schemes should be made to publish the full extent of bonus points awarded in any given applicant's case. How can an applicant know what score they require when they aren't aware of additional scores being added to their raw ATAR/OP? Bonus schemes for equity student categories are useful in supporting the widening participation agenda, however these may need to be capped to ensure appropriate usage.

4. *Is there sufficient knowledge of the range of alternative admissions procedures employed by higher education institutions?*

Most institutions have their own pathway entry schemes and these are generally offered through the institution directly. If these schemes were offered via the relevant tertiary admissions centres as a matter of course, they may become better known to applicants.



**BE WHAT YOU WANT TO BE**  
**cqu.edu.au**

5. *Should there be an annual report of the proportion of students accepted into courses by each higher education institution on the basis of their ATARs and/or what the median ATARs was for each course?*

This could be useful, but will add to the volume of information that applicants will need to be aware of prior to application. If “cut off” information is transparent and available via the relevant tertiary admission centre, it may render such a report redundant. The current publication of median ATAR scores requires further consideration, especially when some courses admit less than 20 students. These scores can easily be misconstrued by applicants.

6. *Do the current state-based Tertiary Admissions Centre arrangements adequately cope with students’ desire for mobility to institutions across state borders? Would a more national approach to managing applications across borders be beneficial?*

While greater interstate mobility is to be encouraged, there are currently issues associated with applicants applying for the same course multiple times across multiple tertiary admissions centres. This can be problematic for institutions in equitably assessing applications, due in part to the significant discrepancies across the various tertiary admissions centres with regard to application processes, assessment methodologies and applicant fees. There is a need for a national approach with consistent schedules and assessment procedures. This could feasibly link with a national approach to high school curriculum, assessment and calculation of ATAR.

7. *Is there an understanding of how such mechanisms as early offers, second round offers and forced offers affect the transparency of higher education entry? How, if at all, should these factors be dealt with for the purposes of transparency?*

The process for such mechanisms differs across the various tertiary admissions centres, as does the level of transparency. A centralised national admissions centre would at least provide some consistency around these factors. Applicants should be able to apply for their preferred course or institution in a fair and transparent way, without concern for strategic manoeuvring. Forcing hundreds of offers in second rounds and top-up rounds is common practice in some states and goes largely unreported.



**BE WHAT YOU WANT TO BE**  
**cqu.edu.au**

8. *What information or enhancements do you think should be added to the Australian Government's Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) website?*

The further addition of anecdotes, case studies and other qualitative information would be useful. This would provide an additional dimension for prospective applicants beyond sheer numbers and statistics.

9. *How best should comparable information on student admissions procedures be made available to the public? What is the most appropriate and effective way to communicate information to students? What information or enhancements do you think should be added to Tertiary Admission Centre websites, university and non-university institution websites, and/or Australian Government websites such as QILT and Study Assist?*

It should be noted that there is currently a high level of information accessible to applicants via the tertiary admissions centres and institutions, however it may be useful to gain improved analytics on how applicants access and interact with this information. A centralised national tertiary admissions centre would provide a consistency of approach, including information and language for students, as well as better analytics capability.

There is a need for national schedules and common assessment practices across tertiary admissions centres. Not all assessment schedules are available on all tertiary admissions centre websites, and this leads to an uneven playing field for applicants. In addition, there is a disconnect between the promotion of QILT and the information that appears on tertiary admissions centre websites. These channels are ideal places to promote QILT and link applicants to more transparent information about their preferred institution.

Applicants are mobile and expect technology to support their research. Many TACs do not have a mobile app or provide the functionality to apply online via a mobile device. Communication via all mediums is necessary with a focus on social media.



**BE WHAT YOU WANT TO BE**  
**cqu.edu.au**

*10. What special measures are needed to ensure equity of access for disadvantaged students?*

The current entry process for equity groups is generous and this information is well understood within schools, with particular emphasis on the six Commonwealth designated equity target groups. More promotion of equity initiatives needs to occur outside of schools (for the benefit of non-school leaver applicants) and within communities and through other mediums.

*11. Can you suggest any other changes that would improve public awareness and understanding of tertiary admissions processes?*

The tertiary admissions centres have limited budgets and resources for technology enhancements and improved databases. Bringing the functions of these TACs together via a national tertiary admissions centre, with transparent governance and nationally consistent application and assessment processes, would provide the necessary economies of scale to ensure sustainability and would also cut down on institutional spending which could be redirected into learning, teaching and research activities.

For more information, please contact:

**Ms Jenny Roberts**

Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Student Experience & Governance  
(07) 4930 6903

[j.roberts@cqu.edu.au](mailto:j.roberts@cqu.edu.au)



**BE WHAT YOU WANT TO BE**  
**cqu.edu.au**