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Professor Kerri-Lee Krause
C/-Secretariat
Admissions Transparency IWG
C50MA7
GPO Box 9880, Canberra ACT 2601
By email: HigherEd@education.gov.au

Dear Professor Krause

[Submission to the Consultation on the Draft Admissions Transparency Implementation Plan](#)

The University of Newcastle (UON) welcomes the Working Group's consultation on the draft Admissions Transparency Implementation Plan. UON is wholly supportive of the principle of standardising admission information amongst higher education providers and appreciates work that has been done to develop the guidelines. As a university with many low SES and first in family students, it has always been our mission to increase participation in higher education amongst our communities and beyond. Greater clarity and transparency around admission decisions will be an obvious benefit to our prospective students and will assist their transition to higher education.

Due to the characteristics of our market, UON consistently strives to ensure our admissions (and other) processes are written and presented in a way that enables access. We have standardised the information on our degree pages and related collateral, developed a section on our website dedicated to explaining ATARs and entry schemes, and have many outreach activities that run throughout the calendar year to explain and clarify admissions processes. With a focus on attracting, retaining and enabling our students' success we have also established a range of resources that assist our prospective students in gaining entry to University and set them up with the best chance to succeed during their time at UON.

In summary, UON welcomes and strongly supports an open and consistent approach to admission transparency, while remaining committed to the fundamental principle that university study should be available to all students who have demonstrated the potential to succeed through all means of prior experience and academic preparation. UON looks forward to contributing to the development of a sector-wide approach to these complex issues.

Comments in relation to specific questions posed by the IWG are provided in the attached.

Yours sincerely

Caroline McMillen
Vice-Chancellor and President

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Draft Admissions Transparency Implementation Plan – Comments

1. Is the proposed approach likely to be effective in increasing transparency and public understanding of how contemporary admissions to higher education work?

If process and terminology accurately reflect the varied target markets perspectives it will improve market understanding of process and offerings across institutions. It is suggested that efforts are made to ensure that process and terminology are not based on what institutions use/ want but rather reflect the diverse prospective student market/s. We note that the implementation plan heavily focuses on current school leavers and the ATAR as a means for entry. Current school leavers are not UON's primary commencing cohort and it is not clear how the implementation plan will adequately increase clarity, transparency and public understanding of admission decisions for non-current school leavers. See Question 6 for a suggestion to further improve understanding for this cohort.

2. How achievable are the proposed implementation timelines, including commitments to deliver a 'best endeavours' version of the proposed information sets to inform students applying to enter study in the 2018 academic year?

The implementation timelines are a major challenge for a number of reasons:

- The final implementation plan is not due for release until June.
- June/July is the mid-year peak for admissions.
- Student services teams are increasingly lean, so to implement such major change alongside 'business as usual' activities will be a major challenge.
- The level of granularity required for the draft information sets (particularly for recent secondary education) may not have been captured in a way that makes this a simple task.
- Major website changes are envisaged to present this information in way that meets prospective student expectations. Though the IWG has suggested PDF docs as a suitable alternative for meeting the requirements, presenting information in this way may not be particularly user-friendly and different narratives and modes of communication will likely be necessary for different cohorts of potential students.

3. If there would be difficulty in delivering the commitments proposed, what could be changed to make them achievable?

Ideally, as long as institutions were seen to be making a genuine effort and progress in this space for the upcoming 2018 intake this should be viewed favourably with progression towards full implementation for 2019 admission or 2018 mid-year admission at the earliest. This would allow time for market research and information to be gathered via the research discovery project for the National Admissions Platform, completion of the research, the launch of the Platform, and use of the market research by institutions to better inform enhancements. It is recognised though that institutions are already at varying stages of provision of clear admissions information, therefore what is progress for one might not be for another. Provision of appropriate roadmaps from each institution demonstrating current progress and timelines for reaching next steps of milestones might be an appropriate approach to take in the meantime.

4. Do you have any comments on the proposed four broad groupings to describe the basis of admission for applicants to higher education?

a. Recent secondary education

- b. Previous higher education study
- c. Previous vocational education and training (VET) study
- d. Work and life experience

In our view, it would be more prudent if the standardisation process (including terminology) was informed by market research with the relevant target audiences and tested with the market prior to implementation. For example, would a prospective student who completed the HSC 10 years ago see themselves in Category D “Work and life experience” and does that (incorrectly) imply that their previous HSC results are not relevant? Also, appendix B section 1 – grouping of applicants – states that individuals will approach the system identifying themselves by their previous education experience. Based on our experience, prospective students also approach from the perspective of what they want to study or what they are interested in, and at that point their previous education experience becomes relevant. It is suggested that the initial entry into the system afford both options, approach by previous education experience AND approach by area of interest. A careers advice type tool could also assist with indicating possible areas of study based on area of interest. It is envisaged that the research project for the platform will uncover such information.

5. Do you agree that the proposed approach to Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) thresholds is reasonable (i.e. replacing the use of the terms “cut-off” and “clearly in” with functional terms describing the lowest ATAR made an offer in the relevant period?). What issues or difficulties, if any, might this raise?

UON notes that the language and concepts associated with admission are quite complex and that there would be significant value in testing proposed terms with the relevant markets. For example, reporting a set minimum ATAR for a program is a slightly different proposition to reporting on the lowest ATAR to receive an offer, or to the lowest ATAR to be admitted. UON would have some concern with setting a minimum ATAR as this would be potentially misleading, particularly when the ATAR of the last student admitted is higher than the advertised minimum ATAR. This is a potential outcome because, as an indicator, ATAR is strongly influenced by program demand. The minimum advertised ATAR may be significant lower than the lowest ATAR that receives an offer due to the quality and number of applicants and the constraints associated with the number of places available. UON further notes that the ATAR issue is not particularly relevant to the majority of UON commencing students, who are non-current school leavers.

6. Do the proposed “information sets” meet the need identified by the Higher Education Standards Panel for comparability of the information available from different providers about the requirements to be admitted to study at each institution and each course that they deliver?

We agree the information sets will make comparability simpler, however would recommend reordering the information with the most relevant information for the target audience displayed at the top. For example, it is suggested that the details of what an applicant has to do and what their options are should be first, followed by the data. Again, this is something that could be researched amongst the target market. Suggested hierarchy of information:

1. About
2. Admissions requirements
3. How to apply
4. Enrolment
5. Student and Campus services
6. Financial assistance
7. Who are our students

- a. Student profile
 - b. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
 - c. Bridging and enabling courses
8. Where to get further information
 9. Appeals and grievances

7. Does the proposed approach set out in the draft implementation plan adequately inform prospective students about admission options or pathways that do not use ATAR? If not, how might this information be improved?

It is not clear how the implementation plan will adequately inform prospective students about admission options or pathways that do not use ATAR. One suggestion to improve understanding is for TACs to provide an online calculator that would allow potential applicants to submit their previous education experience and have a rank calculated that is based on the relevant admission schedule/s. Institutions could then refer prospective applicants to the TAC calculators and outline how they use the selection rank derived, recognising that each institution will likely use slightly different algorithms.

8. Any other feedback you wish to provide on the draft implementation plan and the commitments it outlines is very welcome.

Clarification is requested on whether the draft whole of institution and course admission information sets are to be used as templates. The Government response to the HESP report indicated the adoption of information templates, however the IWG's instructions note that institutions may choose to adapt the overall presentation as long as the specified core information is provided. We understand that the terminology of 'templates' may have shifted towards an 'information set' model that can be better adapted to institutional marketing needs. UON would welcome this but would appreciate clarification as to what would be considered core information

UON is also interested to understand the contexts in which the proposed approach will apply. UON welcomes the implementation of systems to support sharing of best practice, noting that in addition to the formal award programs offered by universities, many institutions across the Sector are looking to develop more flexible credentials that will be offered in a less traditional mode, including short courses, MicroMasters and other credentialing activities. We note that it will be important to distinguish between these more personalized and flexible professional development opportunities while ensuring that our traditional students are well served in terms of transparency.

Professor Caroline McMillen
Vice-Chancellor and President
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