



HEADS OF STUDENT ADMINISTRATION NETWORK

DRAFT ADMISSIONS TRANSPARENCY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN SUBMISSION

Opening remarks

Heads of Student Administration (HoSA) Network would like to make the following written submission to support the feedback provided verbally to the Implementation Working Group and other stakeholders present at the stakeholder consultation hearing on Monday May 8 2017.

The HOSA Group appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission on behalf of its members.

Through its membership, the HoSA network represents those directly responsible for administering current admission practices and has a degree of insight and perspective and as such, we believe can provide valuable feedback on practical considerations as a stakeholder group.

The submission has been prepared by the nominated HOSA delegates, in consultation with HOSA network members.

The nominated delegates are:

- Claire Shaw, University Registrar, Federation University Australia.
- Kathryn Blyth, Academic Registrar & Director Student Administration, Australian Catholic University.

HOSA members fully support the principles outlined and the intent to improve transparency across the Higher Education Sector.

HoSA commends the Minister Hon Simon Birmingham and the Higher Education Standards Panel for their report *Improving the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions* and the six (6) agreed implementation objectives stemming from the report.

HoSA also commends the Implementation Working Group on the considered and complex work undertaken to develop the draft Implementation Plan that has been released for further consultation.

HOSA would welcome the opportunity to participate in the development of the recommendations, either as a working group, or potentially and perhaps more effectively through the TACs.

Key matters noted

1. Information sets

The proposed approach would certainly enhance transparency in comparison to the current environment, although we note that admission processes are complicated and public understanding is difficult to gauge. There continues to be a risk that, despite best efforts, public understanding can be highly influenced by media interpretation, particularly in relation to the ATAR. The approach in itself will go some way to increasing transparency and public understanding, however a sector wide approach to explaining admissions in some detail may be beneficial.

Clarity and consistency of interpretation of categories

Whilst institutions have historically submitted data to HEIMS, there has been inconsistency in interpretation over time both within institutions and across the sector. Given the expended audience of this data that is now proposed and the states aims of transparency greater clarity and consistency is required.

Institutions currently analyze admissions data for TAC/non-direct admissions however there is significant variance regarding direct application processes. To commence collecting and presenting such data consistently across both direct applications and TAC applications will take some time. In the short term there is a risk of inconsistencies between this data and what could be published via the TACs.

HoSA would welcome further discussion and/or opportunity to participate in a sub-working group, to work through the categories and information sets and assist in the creation of some guidance notes and case study examples that would greatly assist in ensuring a consistent interpretation and approach.

We also wonder if there could be a stronger link between admissions and completions data in the interests of transparency to assure and demonstrate the various pathways lead to successful outcomes for students. Without this link there is a risk of perpetuating the perception that entry ATAR is a proxy for quality. Direct comparisons between institutions will then continue to be drawn on this basis when outcomes may be markedly different on the basis of individual institutions' delivery and support models.

We appreciated the clarification provided in relation to the linkage between the implementation plan and the 7.5% performance measures proposed by the government and in particular the statement that year 1 would simply be linked to participation with the best endeavors principles. However HoSA would be concerned if direct links to admissions data were made without further consultation and engagement and bedding down of the data sets.

Course admissions information set – student profile (Appendix D part 6)

In HoSa's opinion, the current order of the profile data may lead to misinterpretation due to the ordering of the information sets which seem to place an emphasis on ATAR entry. Across the sector as a whole, the proportion of non-recent school leavers and direct applicants admitted on the basis of other factors is a significant and increasing source of prospective applicants who we'd wish to seek to encourage to participate in further education.

Further, whilst numbers and % of students previously admitted would give some indication of future admissions practice, this is only indicative and there is again a risk that a small number, or the relative size of previous entry cohorts could be misinterpreted as meaning prospective applicants who would consider themselves to fall into a particular category would be unlikely to gain entry.

Lastly there is also a risk that by including numbers of students at the course level this may be misinterpreted as an indicator of cohort/class sizes and may again act as a deterrent to prospective students. Conversely, to attempt to include this data at a location, cohort level would be complex for institutions to prepare and would be complex for users to understand which may run counter to the transparency intentions.

In response to the question posed during the stakeholder consultation session as to what might assist with this risk, HoSA would like to suggest a more visually engaging and positive indicator for prospective students, careers and advisors and family. This would be to include a green tick box indicator against each entry method under which applicants have been most recently admitted before the data columns and that consideration is given to only presenting percentages for general use and leaving the reporting of specific student numbers for sector analysis.

We would also like to suggest previous tertiary education be amended to read previous post-secondary education as a more intuitive and easily understood term for those not currently in the sector.

2. Portal Development

Timelines and clarity on process beyond the pilot site

Whilst we note that the development of the portal is identified as being outside of scope of the IWG and will be led by the Department, it would appear that the timeline for development of the portal from tender to pilot seems highly ambitious. This view is in comparison to our own institutional and cross sector initiatives such as the MyeQuals project.

Further, based on the MyeQuals roll out experience, HoSA would welcome further details of the proposed implementation plan beyond the pilot.

We would recommend that the timeline to pilot stage be revisited. It would also be greatly appreciated if the implementation plan would allow a degree of flexibility for individual institutions to nominate/opt-in to an integration timeframe that would allow individual institutions to align their implementation with other systems work that they might have planned.).

Further comments and response to the questions posed

HoSA would like to note the following responses and comments in relation to the questions posed.

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

Broadly yes, but with some caution around public understanding and potential for misinterpretation of information sets and this discouraging prospective applicants rather than encouraging as noted above.

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

Challenging but broadly achievable, subject to comments about the portal development.

While presenting course information by August will be challenging and individual member institutions may have specific challenges which they can outline in their Institutional submissions, the ‘best endeavours’ and phased approach to providing the proposed template format is appreciated.

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

See above.

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

The four groupings feel broadly right and will suit the majority of admissions cases.

- 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?**

Yes

The HOSA group is supportive of the intent in changing the functional terminology for Admissions. A consistent approach nationally will help to embed the understanding and language. While we cannot see any major issues or difficulties this might raise in the long term, we note it may take time for stakeholder groups to adjust to the new terminology. Adoption by media and communications will be critical to give the new terminology visibility and credence.

- 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?**

Please refer to previous comments under key matters above.

- 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?**

Broadly yes, although see comments above under key matters re: potential for misinterpretation and negative perceptions of emphasis of ATAR entry deterring applicants from applying rather than encouraging.

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

We would like to highlight the following further opportunities.

Streamlining of data collection and submission. It would be good to ultimately streamline the data feeds so the same source of truth is used and supplied once.

Exit pathways: In the interests of enhancing transparency, we would like to recommend a statement is included that requires that any sub-degree or formal exit pathways are included in the admissions information sets. Many member institutions do this already, but to formally signal the intent would align well with the intent of transparency in admissions.

Transparency and consistency of Equity Bonusing: Another area of inconsistency across Institutions is the application of adjustment factors for equity purposes via the TACs. In keeping with the goal of enhancing transparency we believe there is opportunity to gain greater consistency and transparency across the application of equity adjustment. A laudable goal is that of national consistency and standardisation except where genuine nuances necessitate a different approach (there are always critical exceptions that require individual consideration). HOSA would welcome the opportunity to participate in this exercise, either as a working group or potentially more effectively led through the TACs.