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Secretariat  
Admissions Transparency IWG  
C50MA7  
GPO Box 9880  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Email: HIGHERED@education.gov.au



## **University of Southern Queensland (USQ) Comment on Draft Admissions Transparency Implementation Plan**

### **Consultation questions**

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

- USQ welcomes the opportunity to continue to contribute to sector-wide transparency in Higher Education Admissions and supports the aims expressed by the Higher Education Standards panel.
- The proposal is particularly likely to see improved customer/student experience as a result of increased Tertiary Admissions Centres working more closely together.
- It is unclear whether or not the changes will result in any cost burden to institutions.
- In relation to admissions requirement and process standardisation, USQ would encourage planners to undertake market research with regard to perception on how information might be understood and used by our markets.

#### **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 admissions information required in this proposed collection is a lot more detailed and complicated than what is reported in the current standard student data submissions. Nonetheless the implementation date of July 2019 as part of the HEIMS submissions seems like a reasonable timetable assuming that more detailed systems analysis for the different relevant technologies indicate no intrinsic issues with implementation.
- Appendix D & C includes international data although USQ notes some confusion as International students would not apply through any Tertiary Admissions Centre.
- USQ is concerned about the timelines proposed particularly in relation to the lead-time required for the publishing of USQ Program Guide/Handbook/Publications which would depend on even earlier program offering confirmations at a University level.
- Delivery within the timelines proposed would also rely heavily on timely and comprehensive implementation communication and documentation including clear specifications as well as training.

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

- To achieve the proposed implementation dates the implementation plan needs to be very specific in intent but perhaps less prescription in execution. Otherwise the implementation is less readily fitted into the significant web presence that institutions already maintain generally through complex information systems.
- For instance, the draft whole-of-institution admissions information set (Appendix C) currently specifies – despite some wording to suggest otherwise – that all the information in the set is to be provided in one location. Good web site usability and design principles would suggest a different approach where access to all the information is provided at least from one location. As a bonus such an appropriate web-based approach would minimize changes for institutional websites where the information (or at least most of it) is already available in different locations and reduce the effort to maintain and risk in maintaining duplicate information. Further such a web-enabled approach would encourage readers to

more readily access relevant-to-them information rather than be deterred by scanning through irrelevant information.

- USQ strongly supports 2018 being allocated for preparation and supports the Queensland Tertiary Admissions recommendation to allow TAC's and institutions to move from a 'best endeavours' approach to instead to achieve a coordinated, student-centric outcome for students by focussing on implementation for the 2019 academic year.

**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**

USQ remains unsure regarding implications for reporting on this grouping. Applicants can use secondary education to gain entry into a program of study after 2 years.

**b) Previous higher education study**

USQ offers a Head Start program which allows high-achieving Year 10, 11 or 12 students to study one university subject during a semester effectively allowing them to start university studies early. USQ would require clarification as to whether this cohort would be considered as having 'previous higher education study.' Students can do as few as 1 or as many as 5 Head Start courses while at school. If the tertiary entrance rank from Head Start courses is higher than their secondary study (OP) then the basis of admission under these definitions is previous higher education.

USQ is unclear how those coming through with a rank rather than an OP are being reported. The paper suggests no reporting of rank for groups B – D however there does not seem to be an allowance for the HeadStart student example above where rank is used.

USQ agrees with the separation of tertiary study and Work and Life Experience. VET and tertiary are two different styles of education and may reflect different stories in terms of preparedness and graduation success. USQ suggests previous higher education be amended to read previous post-secondary education as a more intuitive and easily understood term for those not currently in the sector.

**c) Previous vocational education and training (VET) study**

**d) Work and life experience**

USQ currently defines basis of admission on their highest rank not their most current. E.g. An applicant could be gaining admission from Secondary Study from 15 years ago. They may only present their secondary studies and that is what is assessed. Alternatively, it may provide them with the highest rank. Why is currency important – currently USQ uses 'Secondary Education' for HEIM's. Under this proposal these applicants would fall under 'Work and Life Experience'. Technically though, they are gaining admission on the basis of their secondary education.

**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?**

- Even though it is lengthier, USQ is supportive of the proposed new language in the interests of consistency. It provides clear, plain language and context for applicants/interested parties.

**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?**

- The information set (Appendix C) element 2, 'Student profile' should refer to only undergraduate and sub-degree award students. Conflating this with the data for postgraduate and higher degree research students would reduce clarity for readers which defeats the purpose.

- As it is often a determining factor for prospective students, USQ recommends that inclusion of exit qualifications for certain programs would be beneficial.
- USQ notes the omission of information regarding English Language Proficiency.
- USQ believes it would be beneficial to measure admissions basis against graduation. E.g. Do students with work experience have the same success rate as those with Secondary studies?
- USQ believes there is a risk to including numbers of students at the course (USQ=subject) level as this may be misinterpreted as an indicator of cohort/class sizes and may again act as a deterrent to prospective students.

**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 would be useful if the implementation plan itself did not use a term that does not have a consistent meaning across the sector. That term is "course"; the term "program" would be a fair more consistently understood term.
- If a move to "course" as a mandatory term is to be inferred from its use in the plan, this is strongly objected to as the system and information changes requirements implicit in that for some organisations such as USQ is basically so unreasonable to not be feasible.
- USQ is concerned that in the interests of accessibility and equity, multiple entry pathways (other than via secondary education) should be reflected in the proposed approach. We note the absence of 'Rank' reporting.

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

- Reference is made to consultation with stakeholders but it is not actually clear the level of consultation with the intended users (and beneficiaries) of the changes. And the plans for further inclusion of that within the implementation schedule – might there not for instance be a pilot implementation and user assessment of at least the front-facing changes before the whole sector undertakes the effort involved.
- USQ are interested in knowing what the metrics will be for measuring the success of such a significant implementation effort.
- In relation to the analysis of admissions data there are significant differences regarding direct application processes. USQ notes that there could be inconsistencies in data sets in the short term. If the rank/TER is considered under the reporting measures there would be less risk of inconsistencies.
- Is there a schedule for roll-out of the communication and training plan which can be made available for institutions?
- USQ notes that the initial focus is for the prospective domestic undergraduate market. Does this imply that the impact will broaden into postgraduate and international markets?
- USQ notes international reporting is in both appendices and are concerned about consistency.
- USQ would appreciate if the implementation plan would allow a degree of flexibility for individual institutions to nominate/opt-in to an integration timeframe that would allow us to align our implementation with other systems work we have in train.

Yours faithfully



Carl Rallings  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students & Communities)

**OFFICE OF STUDENTS & COMMUNITIES**

Mr Carl Rallings

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students & Communities)

Phone +61 7 4631 2759 | Fax+61 7 4635 9225

Email: [Carl.Rallings@usq.edu.au](mailto:Carl.Rallings@usq.edu.au)