

VICTORIAN TERTIARY ADMISSIONS CENTRE

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VTAC Submission on Terms of Reference for Review of Australia's Higher Education System

VTAC's role: connecting learners and providers, expanding opportunities for all

The Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Australian Universities Accord Panel's priorities for its Review of Australia's higher education system. As a tertiary admissions centre, VTAC plays a key role in connecting learners and higher education institutions, especially in guiding students through the transition from secondary to tertiary education.

We aim to empower, connect, and support learners and providers to enable transparent and inclusive access to education. Our strategic plan puts stakeholders at the centre of what we do, supporting universities, TAFE institutes, independent tertiary colleges and their students, and engaging with emerging forms of teaching and learning. We advocate to achieve the best outcomes for learners and providers.

Supporting students from all backgrounds through the transition from secondary or work to tertiary education has been a core part of VTAC's mission for over fifty years. In recent years this has expanded to services for postgraduate study, graduate-entry programs, tertiary education pathways and professional programs. Furthermore, we are developing a service framework for lifelong learning, providing a trusted and comprehensive resource to prospective students at any age, any career stage, and at all levels of study.

The Accord provides the opportunity for sector-wide reform to make our tertiary education system more inclusive and better able to meet Australia's needs. As a central body with activities across secondary schools, tertiary institutions and more broadly in the community, VTAC has a keen interest in improving outcomes for all stakeholders and looks forward to engaging further with the Accord process.

VTAC suggests that, as key activities, the Accord:

- **Provide a future-focused vision for the tertiary and higher education sector as a whole which demonstrates its ongoing value to young people exiting secondary education, non-school leavers, industry, and the community.**



- Establish a framework for improving access and opportunity which recognises the diversity of existing initiatives while providing clear identification of target groups and enabling nationally consistent measurement and evaluation.
- Consider the role of microcredentials and other emerging forms of learning within the context of the higher education system.
- Examine the support systems available to students, workers and community members in navigating career and study pathways at all stages of study, career, and life.
- Consider the role of tertiary admissions centres in facilitating, promoting, and evaluating career and study information for diverse range of audiences, tertiary education pathways, and access and equity programs.
- Consider the role of tertiary admissions centres with regard to collaborations, engagement and communication between schools, tertiary education providers, government (including state curriculum authorities), and industry/employers.

Access and opportunity

Removing barriers to higher education should be a priority of any reforms.

VTAC currently operates the Special Entry Access Scheme (SEAS) on behalf of Victorian tertiary institutions, which provides prospective students with a streamlined process for applying for and receiving special consideration at the time of course entry. VTAC received and processed almost 40,000 SEAS applications in 2022, covering factors including demographic under-representation, financial disadvantage, medical conditions and disability, and other difficult circumstances, including Covid-19 impacts.

One challenge in addressing disadvantage is ensuring that eligible students are aware of relevant equity schemes including scholarships and supported to apply. In addition to providing direct applicant support, VTAC works with Victorian secondary schools to increase awareness of equity schemes, but more coordinated efforts between schools, tertiary admissions centres, and tertiary institutions can increase utilisation by eligible applicants and reduce the number who fall through the cracks.



The centralised admissions processes for year 12 students provide a rich source of data in evaluating the reach and effectiveness of equity programs and other admissions outcomes. VTAC has collaborated with Orygen, the national youth mental health service, to use deidentified equity data to assess levels of mental ill-health during young people's transition to further education. A forthcoming journal article will assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Australian tertiary admissions centres in all states work together under the auspices of the Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admissions Centres (ACTAC), and are well-placed to coordinate design, implementation, and evaluation of programs aiming to increase participation through their engagement with learners and providers.

Considerations:

- Identify clear target groups for increased participation.
- Examine possibilities to leverage tertiary admissions centres as trusted sources of student advice and coordination between the secondary and tertiary education sectors.
- Engage with tertiary admissions centres with regard to current and future access and equity initiatives, including pathways.

Meeting Australia's knowledge and skills needs, now and in the future

Tertiary admissions centres play a key role in course and career discovery for prospective students. Between the opening of VTAC applications on 1 August and 16 December, 458,449 individual searches were recorded on VTAC CourseSearch, with additional activity on other school-focused planning tools like the VTAC Prerequisite and Course Explorer.

Labour market data is currently provided through a variety of Australian Government websites, including the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#), [Your Career](#), [Labour Market Insights](#), and the [National Skills Commission](#). The recent and ongoing setup of Jobs and Skills Australia creates an opportunity for employment projection data to be more closely integrated with course offerings from tertiary institutions at the point of student discovery. This integration would benefit both secondary students and older adults exploring tertiary study.



As complexity in the labour market increases and more targeted qualifications such as microcredentials become more prevalent, it will be necessary to match prospective students and courses in a highly targeted manner. Emerging work from multiple research groups is focused on new ways to recognise student success which will supplement or replace the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). VTAC is already engaging with some of these groups to explore the future of admissions processes, which can provide benefit to students by allowing access to the most suitable courses, and benefit providers by selecting students with the most suitable capabilities for each specific course.

Additionally, trends in all states show an increase in students opting for alternative assessment, such as the unscored VCE in Victoria, and an increase in school refusal following the Covid-19 pandemic. It is vital that a future higher education system provide entry points for students to re-engage with education at all stages of life.

It is important that the Accord takes into consideration past and current reforms and reports on work in tertiary and higher education, and facilitate the sharing of learnings between the various programs and the Accord process. For example, the ongoing admissions transparency work undertaken by the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) will consider emerging admissions practices in the next phase of its work in 2023. This work may provide valuable information for the Accord, particularly around expanding opportunities, access and equity.

Considerations:

- Assess the most effective ways of providing employment projections and other labour market data to prospective students at the time of course discovery.
- Consider ways of translating future skills needs to influence current and future student behaviour and choices with regard to study.
- Explore emerging assessment practices to assess how more detailed information on student capability can best be used to match prospective students with the most suitable courses.
- Establish policy frameworks which reflect trends in participation and enable re-engagement of learners throughout all stages of life, and at all course levels.

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Supporting the work of the Panel

From prospective students to secondary schools, tertiary providers to government, VTAC works with stakeholders in every key group related to tertiary education and has a keen interest in supporting positive and impactful outcomes from the Accord.

Please contact [REDACTED] to discuss how we can best support the work of the Panel.