Improving the transparency of higher education admissions: QUICK REFERENCE

A joint higher education sector and Australian Government admissions transparency implementation plan aims to improve access for students, parents and schools to high quality information on admission requirements for all Australian higher education courses and institutions (Download the plan at https://docs.education.gov.au/node/44471).

Why are these changes occurring?
The Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) in October 2016 found an increasing variety of application pathways and admissions processes in higher education. This reflects the growing diversity of applicants in the demand driven system. But students, for whom many of the new application pathways were created to help, face considerable complexity in navigating the system.

This is particularly so for students who are first in family, or from disadvantaged backgrounds or regions, who may have less access to career advice and other forms of support, including informal advice from family and friends.

The Higher Education Standards Framework requires all institutions to make information accessible to all prospective students in plain English to assist their decisions about courses or units of study, including course design, prerequisites and all the relevant entry requirements and admission policies.

Providers already publish this information but it is often hard to find in a consolidated format and difficult to make direct comparisons between different institutions’ admission requirements and processes.

The HESP recommended sector-wide effort is needed to simplify and improve access to readily comparable information on admission requirements and processes. It recommended a common approach be adopted to the types of admission-related information published; in order to ensure applicants can readily find the key information in consistent formats that they can compare across different courses and providers.

What is changing?
The implementation plan sets out six objectives:

1. Standardised presentation of admissions information
2. Adoption of common admissions terminology
3. Revised ATAR-related thresholds and definitions
4. Tertiary Admission Centres adopt more consistent approaches and reporting and streamline interstate application processes
5. TEQSA monitoring and guidance on admissions transparency
6. New national admissions information platform

How will this be achieved?
The key mechanism to deliver consistency is the adoption of agreed ‘information sets’ on the key admission-related information that should be available in consistent formats and using consistent terminology. These information sets describe the types of information required to inform student choice. They are not strict templates. Providers can adapt and design the layout of content to suit their institution’s needs.

Two information sets are specified:

- **Whole of institution admission set** (Appendix C of the plan). This sets out the common admission policies and requirements that apply to all (or the vast majority of) courses offered by the provider. Only one version of this is needed per institution. The range of information needed is similar to that already published by some Tertiary Admission Centres.

- **Program/course admission information set** (appendix D of the plan). This sets out the admission-related information specific to each course that is different from the whole-of-institution rules; plus a small amount of comparable data about recent offers and enrolments in the course. One of these is needed for each course or closely related group of courses.
The initial focus is information needed to support applications by domestic undergraduate students studying in Australia. Admission requirements for postgraduate and international students and data for any students enrolled in Australia but studying offshore in other countries do not need to be included in the information sets. These could potentially be included at a later date once the initial implementation has been achieved.

Data reported in the information sets includes all offers of places, whether direct entry or managed through Tertiary Admission Centres, and all commencements that remain enrolled past the course census date.

**Detailed instructions on how to use each of the information sets are provided at the start of Appendix C and Appendix D of the implementation plan**

**When do the changes need to be made?**
A staged approach to implementation is being taken. The products that all institutions need to deliver are:

**Stage one**
By end August 2017 a limited set of information in the new format to inform students entering study in 2018:

- the full whole-of-institution information set – once for each institution
- a limited program/course information set focusing on comparable data for each course offered
- adopt common terms and ATAR thresholds for information and data reported in the information sets.

In recognition that institutions already have student information well advanced for applicants to study in 2018, a ‘best endeavours’ approach is acceptable in stage one. At a minimum, a ‘pdf’ or similar with the required information should be available on provider websites, alongside existing material.

**Stage two**
By end May 2018, the full information sets for information targeted to applicants entering study in 2019.

- the full whole-of-institution information set – once for each institution
- full course information set for each course offered
- available on provider websites

The full replacement of any previously published material that does not conform to the information set approach is expected in stage two.

**Stage 3**
By end August 2018 the National Admissions Information Platform will be operational.

**Where to get help and advice**
- Tertiary Admission Centres – members should talk to their local centre
- Provider peaks – members can contact Universities Australia, COPHE, ACPET, TAFE Directors Australia
- TEQSA – [www.teqsa.gov.au](http://www.teqsa.gov.au) will include information and guidance to support implementation of the admissions transparency initiatives. You can also contact TEQSA at admissions@teqsa.gov.au.
- Webinars and provider information sessions – webinars and a small number of face-to-face information sessions will be delivered during August 2017. Details will be posted at the [admissions transparency webpage](http://www.education.gov.au/admissions-transparency-implementation-working-group-0) noted above.