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Professor Peter Coaldrake AO, Vice-Chancellor

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Professor Peter Shergold AC  
Chair, Higher Education Standards Panel  
C50MA7  
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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Peter'.

Dear Professor Shergold

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to consultation on the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions Processes. I am pleased to attach QUT's submission.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Peter'.

Professor Peter Coaldrake AO  
Vice-Chancellor



**Submission to the  
Higher Education Standards Panel Consultation on  
Higher Education Admissions Processes**

QUT acknowledges the importance of ensuring that admissions processes are clear, readily available to prospective students, and assist them in making optimal decisions about what and where they might study.

Our submission to the Panel is intended to support the principles and material set out in the submissions from Universities Australia and the Australian Technology Network, and to provide information about QUT's own approach and context.

Overall, QUT is in agreement with the 10 principles set out in the discussion paper. Our fundamental positions are that admissions policy is best determined by institutions and that most of the information needed by students, particularly for Queensland institutions and QUT in particular, is currently available. However, we recognise that greater consistency and improved reporting is both possible and desirable.

The discussion paper acknowledges the considerable diversity of the student body, the dynamic nature of course development, the complexity of matching of supply with demand across different institutional contexts and priorities and across different time periods, and the need to address the needs of students who might for various reasons have their prospects of higher education compromised. Standardisation and simplification is desirable up to a point, but the processes will inevitably be complex.

The discussion paper notes that "the ATAR was devised as a rationing device to allocate places in courses with limited numbers of places. With the lifting of caps on places in most courses, this rationing imperative no longer applies in the same way". However, the removal of government caps does not mean that institutions do not themselves need to balance supply and demand at the undergraduate level. QUT relies in the first instance on assessment of student past performance (ATAR for school leavers and a parallel rank for non-school-leavers) to determine quotas for most undergraduate course entry<sup>1</sup>. Prior to study and when it can be applied, ATAR is the best population-level predictor of student outcomes that can be used at the scale required (QUT admits some 12,000 students each year). However, it does not fix an individual person's fate and it does not reflect the different opportunities students have experienced or the pathways they have followed.

With the advent of the demand-driven system, QUT has expanded its undergraduate population in line with a number of factors including our own capacity, student demand, graduate prospects and industry demand. Over the period 2010-2014 our undergraduate population has grown by 10 per cent, but in doing so we have not lowered intake standards, in fact the mean ATAR for incoming undergraduates has slightly increased.

In addition to "raw" ATAR we provide a range of special entry programs with the rationale and criteria clearly set out for prospective students

(<https://www.qut.edu.au/study/applying/undergraduate-applications/special-entry-programs>).

These include bonus point arrangements for elite athletes and for students who have undertaken particular subjects at school, and an assessment process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students which can lead to forced offers. However, the principal special entry program is the **Educational Access Scheme (EAS)** which enables eligible students to qualify for bonus OPs or ranks. It should be noted that the EAS is a program that has been designed across Queensland institutions

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<sup>1</sup> For some courses, such as performing arts, alternative assessments such as auditions are used.

and is administered by the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC). It should also be noted that the scheme is an evidence-based mechanism with a clear justification, namely to address inequalities in secondary schooling and the depressing effect on achievement of poverty and related disadvantages. While individual universities may differ in the bonuses offered, QTAC ensures consistency in assessment of eligibility and publishes a report which benchmarks and compares outcomes. The EAS is overseen by a QTAC working party (EAWP) composed of institution representatives from both equity and admission areas of institutions. All member and participating institutions are invited to be represented on the EAWP. In addition to overseeing EAS, the EAWP makes recommendations to QTAC around a broad range of issues with the aims of increasing the equity of tertiary admissions and enhancing access for traditionally underrepresented members of the community.

Information about QUT's bonus point schemes is strongly promoted both by ourselves and QTAC. We acknowledge that nationally there would be varying degrees of understanding of such arrangements depending on the degree of admission advisement service available to applicants and their supporters. Therefore **we support the UA position that greater consistency in terminology and presentation should be developed.** This is also relevant to the agenda of widening participation: our concern is that those who can best benefit from this information are able to access and understand what is on offer. Indeed, QUT urges the Panel to ensure that attention to improvements in the transparency of admissions processes does not overshadow the priority that needs to be given to ensuring that disadvantaged students are encouraged to apply to universities in the first place.

We note the proposal to **publish an annual report on student acceptances by ATAR.** At present comprehensive statistics by individual course and institution are published by QTAC for QTAC admissions in Queensland for each major admission period. These include applications and offers, separate enrolments for Queensland Year 12 students and others, and the ranks of the lowest offered Queensland school-leaver and other applicants. Offers by Queensland Overall Position and institution are prepared and available to providers, but they are not currently available on the public QTAC website. While there are some fundamental differences in State-based school curricula and university admissions criteria, the assembly of a national admissions report which provides greater information to prospective students could be useful. The underlying data for such reporting is also likely to be available in the DET Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances collection.

However, it will be important to reinforce Principle 9 of the discussion paper: prior year information can only be a guide to prospective students given the complexity and volatility of the overall process. Further, given the necessary and desirability of diversity in admissions processes it will be important not to give ATAR undue emphasis.

It is also important to avoid confusing the primary purpose of other reporting mechanisms. For example Study Assist is not an aid to admission, instead it provides information for students about government assistance for financing tertiary study. QILT provides summary information, by institution and broad study area, with the intention of addressing quality of teaching and learning. When it comes to individual courses, inquiries are appropriately linked to the provider website.

On the matter of **student mobility**, QUT notes that around 90 per cent of the applicants who enrolled via QTAC offers in Semester 1, 2015 had their highest entry qualification from Queensland and a further 4 per cent came from NSW (and it is likely that many of these arose from the proximity of Queensland providers to northern NSW). Mobility across States does not seem to be a priority for the majority, and we caution that the additional complexity that would arise from efforts to "nationalise" admissions could well be counterproductive. Furthermore, as competition in the sector increases, the notion that either a national or state TAC is the place where a prospective student might apply to enter a course is likely to weaken in the face of increased direct admission to providers.