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Higher Education Standards Panel Secretariat
C50MA7, GPO Box 9880
CANBERRA ACT 2601

(Via email: HigherEd@education.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

University of the Sunshine Coast Submission
HESP Consultation on the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions Processes

The University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) thanks the Panel for the consultative approach and opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed principles relating to transparency of university admissions processes and criteria.

USC endorses principles which support maximising transparency, comparability and institutional autonomy across Higher Education admissions processes. These pillars are core to delivering a fair, effective and student-centred outcome.

USC notes that in a differentiated university sector there will, inevitably and appropriately, be variation across the sector in admissions processes. Universities use a range of methods to identify students who have the capability to succeed at university, noting that across the sector, commencing undergraduate students who are admitted on the basis of recent Year 12 school results are in the minority. These methods include: reference to the ATAR (the OP in Queensland) for secondary school leavers; VET study; auditions or portfolios; admissions tests; tertiary study preparation pathway programs; and direct entry pathways for selected cohorts. These alternative entry methods facilitate increased participation rates of equity groups and encourage entry into discipline areas vital to the development of specific sectors of the Australian and global economy.

The achievement of an ATAR, while the most commonly known means of entry to a higher education program, is a poorly understood one. The ATAR score is often incorrectly interpreted as being solely related to, and identifying, the level of difficulty of a specific course of study. Prospective students are generally unaware that it is more likely to be related to supply and demand factors. For certain programs it may be necessary to have a high ATAR cut-off simply due to the resources available for providing the program. This dependence on the ATAR score as a "rationing" mechanism has been less important in the context of the demand-driven system, which gives institutions flexibility to respond to increased demand in particular disciplines. For example, in the past when university places in different disciplines were strictly controlled, increased demand from students for entry to engineering would have been managed by using the ATAR to keep perfectly capable students out.

In order to facilitate greater understanding and transparency around university admissions processes, USC suggests that it be a requirement that all Higher Education Providers use a single, easily accessible webpage that allows prospective students to ascertain information on all available pathways into courses of study. Again, given the variation across the sector in terms of the way in which the different Tertiary Admission Centres operate and the differing missions and profiles of institutions, it would not be prudent to mandate that this information should be presented in an identical format for all institutions. Rather, such a resource should include information written in a simple and understandable way on key admissions terms and processes, such as the indicative nature of cut-off scores; an explanation on the various offer rounds; how and why bonus points are applied; special entry tests; how professional qualifications and/or employment experience can be considered; and so on. Retrospective data on previous admissions rounds should also be provided in a consistent format (for ATAR entry, this might be the range of ATARs and the median). This arrangement would additionally support comparability across the sector, thereby enabling operational consistency across all institutions.

In terms of specific responses to questions within the consultation paper:

Question 5: USC has no opposition to annual reporting; however, it would need to be clarified what, to whom and for what purpose. Clarification on these points is warranted in order to avoid unnecessary administrative red tape.

Question 8: At a minimum, the QILT website should provide access for students to search on course of studies offered nationally with links to provider websites and TACs. This site provides the opportunity to contain the answers to questions outlined in this consultation paper.

USC welcomes further consultation on this important matter. Further enquiries can be directed to Mr Tony Reed, Director, Student Services and Engagement (email: treed@usc.edu.au or telephone: 07 5430 1212).

Yours sincerely,



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