

Universities Admissions Centre (UAC)

SUBMISSION

Response to the Higher Education Standards
Panel's *Consultation on the Transparency of Higher
Education Admissions Processes*

Universities Admissions Centre

ABOUT US

The Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) Pty Ltd (UAC) was established in 1995 and is the largest tertiary admissions centre in Australia. Owned by universities in NSW and the ACT, our mission is to provide excellence in admissions services and promote equity of access to tertiary education. Central to that mission is a strong culture of servicing the needs of all our stakeholders, in particular our institutions and applicants.

UAC has a trusted and valued position in the higher education sector. Applicants, in particular Year 12 students, turn to UAC for unbiased and authoritative information about university admissions and courses and for an easy interface with which to apply. Institutions rely upon UAC services to handle the bulk of the admissions process, allowing them to focus on their core capabilities of learning and teaching, research and community engagement. Parents, schools, the media and the general public know UAC as their first point of reference for university admissions in NSW and the ACT.

UAC is a member of the Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres (ACTAC), the group that facilitates communication and co-operation between tertiary admissions centres in Australia and New Zealand. UAC's Managing Director is the current Chair of ACTAC.



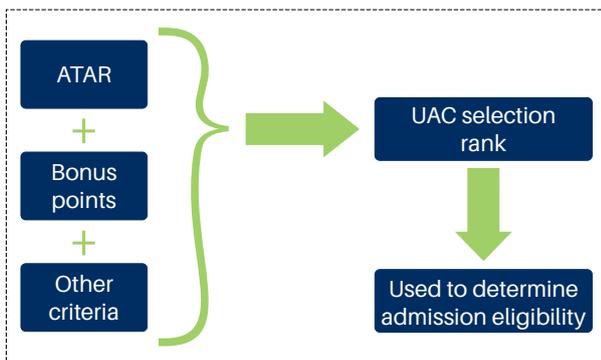
Executive summary

The current system of university admissions in NSW and the ACT has transparency built into it. UAC provides comprehensive, comparable and consistently presented information to students, schools and the public. Institutions have autonomy regarding selection criteria and other policies; UAC administers those policies and communicates with applicants.

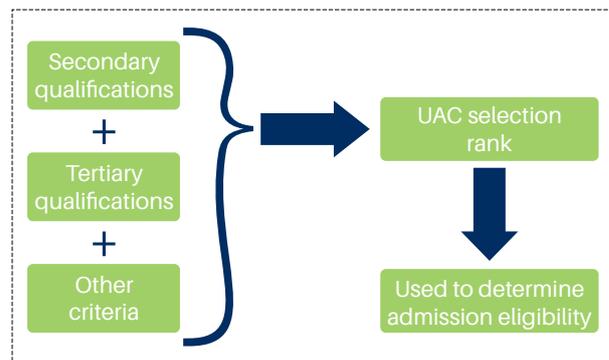
“ UAC is currently developing a new model for undergraduate admissions. The first principle of the new model is that it be student-centric in its approach. ”

The basis of the UAC admissions process is the UAC selection rank. This is a number (like the ATAR) that is calculated for each applicant for each of their course preferences. For Year 12 students, it may be the ATAR alone, or it may be the ATAR plus bonus and other points, or it may be a number derived from other criteria (such as performance at an audition or interview, ATSI status etc). For non-Year 12 students the rank is usually derived from a mix of criteria such as Year 12 results, other qualifications (such as a TAFE Diploma) and even employment experience. The following graphics illustrate how the selection rank may be derived for Year 12s and non-Year 12s.

Year 12 selection rank



Non-Year 12 selection rank



There is a misconception in the community, and even in some pockets of government and the sector, that all university admissions are based on ATAR. Clearly, this is not the case. Many applicants are not coming directly from Year 12 and may not have an ATAR or even an equivalent to it, and even for Year 12s ATAR is not the only criteria used. The selection rank is the basis of the admissions process, and it can have a number of inputs.

This system has been in place for many years, and UAC has provided consistent information to schools and students about this system through publications such as the *UAC Guide*, and through content on our website and other digital channels.

While there is nothing new about the concept of the UAC selection rank, for Year 12 students there has been a shift in recent years in terms of the percentage of students being selected on more than just ATAR. While 10 years ago for most Year 12 students their UAC rank would have been simply their ATAR, now for most Year 12 students their UAC rank is their ATAR plus bonus points. This reflects the growth in bonus points and other schemes at universities during those years.

UAC has endeavoured throughout this time to ensure that Year 12 students are aware of the operation of bonus points, and we have made information available to schools and students through all our communications and community engagement activities. Questions about bonus points are often a feature of our interactions with careers advisers and Year 12 students, who in the main are aware of these points, and proactive about using them in relation to their applications.

However, it must be acknowledged that there are limitations in the system that has been and continues to be in place. In spite of our efforts to increase awareness and understanding, those limitations are indeed primarily about just that. It's not that there is not enough information available, it's that the information can sometimes be complex, which hampers understanding. We must also acknowledge that awareness and understanding are too often compromised by other factors such as level of parental education, quality of school support and careers advice, and socio-economic status.

There is no doubt that all students should have equal knowledge about how university admissions work. Now that the debate around the transparency of university admissions is very much in the public domain, the time is ripe for UAC and its partners to revisit the process and the way we communicate with applicants.

In conjunction with universities in NSW and the ACT, UAC is currently developing a new model for undergraduate admissions. The first principle of the new model is that it be student-centric in its approach.

Our goal with the new model is to make the process easier to understand, and provide applicants with the suite of information they need to make informed decisions about their course choices. We also need to move away from the well-known, but misunderstood, term 'cut-off' and instead refer to the 'course entry score'. We must ensure that there is a deeper understanding of the selection rank and that for most prospective students it is more than just ATAR.

In addition, UAC's digital renewal project will provide applicants with intelligent interfaces in which to access this information and manage their application.

In developing the new model, UAC is responding to current and future changes in the regulatory landscape. The revised Higher Education Standards, which will take effect from 1 January 2017, provide the operating framework for not only the current but also any new admissions system: they contain clearly articulated requirements in relation to admissions transparency, and the provision of information for prospective students. The new model aims to not only meet these requirements but exceed them.

UAC is therefore very well-placed to advise prospective students of admissions criteria and how the criteria will be used in relation to their individual applications and course choices. In addition, UAC is also able to then report back on how students have been admitted into those courses previously, providing a full picture of the admissions landscape.

Note about UAC's response

While the summary above illustrates the key aspects of UAC's role in university admissions now and into the future, detailed responses to the panel's questions follow and provide more information. The answers following reflect the Year 12-centric nature of the questions, and are accordingly framed primarily, but not exclusively, in terms of Year 12 applicants.

Question 1

Based on your experience, what is the most important information needed to help potential higher education students determine which course to study and which institution to apply for? Please feel free to rank the different types of information in order of importance.

- Examples could include information about course prerequisites, ATAR cut-offs, other non-ATAR-related entry options or requirements, possible career pathways and qualification requirements, institution reputation, campus facilities, course cost, student peer cohort characteristics, family history or other connections to a particular institution, accreditation of a course by a professional body or association, graduate employment and earnings outcomes, student reviews or surveys of teaching quality, recommendations from friends or family.

Current students

'Point in time' importance

The information that is most important to a potential higher education student cannot be identified from an absolute perspective, but depends upon where the student is in their schooling. As a whole, the information trail matches a basic pattern of inquiry:

- What am I good at?
- What career do I want?
- What course do I need to do?
- Where can I do that course?
- What are the features of the institutions offering that course?
- What do I need to get in?

Year 10

UAC's engagement through multimedia content and community liaison starts at the Year 10 stage to foster an awareness of higher education options and requirements which have a significant bearing on the immediate decision the cohort is facing – Year 11/12 subject selection.

The most important information for Year 10 students is that around course and subject prerequisites and additional selection criteria for courses they might be interested in pursuing after school. Year 10 students either want to choose the subjects they need to enter specific courses that they have already decided upon, or choose subjects that will give them enough flexibility to enter a range of courses where they haven't already decided what they want to do.

To this end, the primary source of information from UAC is *University Entry Requirements for Year 10 Students*, which lists the prerequisites, assumed knowledge, recommended studies and additional selection criteria for all courses at all UAC institutions. It also has worksheets which help students to initially map interests, qualities and skills, and then maps those to courses, institutions and Year 12 subjects.

Feedback we have received from careers advisers in NSW and the ACT is that this publication is the single most important source of information for Year 10 students looking at options for university study.

Year 12

In contrast to Year 10s, who are very focused on choosing the most appropriate mix of subjects for Years 11 and 12, Year 12 students look at a number of factors to help them decide on what to study and where to study it. They will certainly look at:

- cut-offs
- additional entry requirements
- possible careers, employment prospects and earnings
- institution reputation, facilities and location
- recommendations from friends and family.

In the end, however, their primary considerations are: 'Where can I do x course?' and 'What do I need to get in at each of those places?'

For that reason, the *UAC Guide* is a paramount source of information for Year 12 students. Every Year 12 student in NSW and the ACT receives a free copy of the Guide in July each year, ahead of the opening of applications in August for the following year's entry. The *UAC Guide* has comprehensive information about university entry, application procedures and courses available.

For Year 12 students, the most used sections of the Guide are Table 1, which lists every course and the cut-off from last year, and the index, which lists study areas and the institutions that offer courses in those areas.

The printed Guide is still widely used, but that information is also accessed through digital channels on UAC's website and mobile app.

Feedback we have received from careers advisers in NSW and the ACT is that information from UAC is critical to Year 12 students. While they are considering a range of things, including government information and information from specific institutions, the information from UAC is not only valuable as a multi-institution 'one-stop-shop', it is also seen as objective and authoritative information that students can rely upon. The information from UAC is consistently presented and comparable.

Non-current school leavers

The information for this group of potential students places greater emphasis on alternative entry options or pathways, in addition to practical considerations, which reflect the wider range of motivations and circumstances of the group.

The specific issue, and transparency challenge, is that alternative entry options for this group do not translate to a reportable rank. UAC and its institution partners recognise that improvement is required in this area and are addressing it within the new admissions model.

Question 2

Is knowledge about how the ATAR rankings are calculated and published 'cut-off' thresholds a significant influencing factor on course and institution preferences? How could this information be made more accessible and useful?

ATAR calculation

While knowledge of how ATARs are calculated is very important for teachers, students and parents, it has no practical bearing on course and institution preferences. It has a bearing on subject selection at Year 10 stage, and while maintaining a pattern of study throughout Years 11 and 12, but at the time of choosing university courses it is not particularly important. What is important at that stage is 'What is my ATAR going to be?' rather than 'How is my ATAR calculated?' To ensure that students, schools and the community understand the process behind the ATAR, detailed calculation information is freely available and contained within the following publications which can be downloaded from UAC's website:

- *Calculating the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank in New South Wales: A Technical Report* describes the technical details surrounding the calculation of the ATAR and provides a brief historical background to the current procedures.
- *Report on the Scaling of the NSW Higher School Certificate*, an annual publication, contains information on the calculation of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank for a particular year. It includes an overview of the HSC and the ATAR, a breakdown of the scaling process, analysis of HSC and ATAR statistics and notes trends for the year.

Of necessity, the calculation of the ATAR is a complex process. The experience of the communication and community liaison teams at UAC indicates that there is a definite information threshold regarding the calculation of the ATAR. A simplified six-step version is contained in the *All About Your ATAR* booklet which is sent in hard copy to Year 12 students and available on the UAC website. UAC also generates introductory content for parents and supporting content for student advisers, all available on our website and through community liaison.

The efficacy of further initiatives in relation to, and emphasis upon, the actual calculation of the ATAR is limited. The very fact that the ATAR is a mathematical construct can feed into the myth that the ATAR can be gamed or beaten, which in turn can inspire erroneous subject choices.

Published cut-offs

Published cut-offs are a significant factor in influencing course and institution preferences as they represent a basis for answering the basic question of 'What do I need to get in?' Most Year 12 students are conversant with the concept of cut-offs and use the current UAC information to help guide their course and institution preferences, through the *UAC Guide* and the comprehensive and powerful cross-comparison course search tools on UAC's website and mobile app.

Most Year 12 students are also aware that the cut-off is inclusive of bonus points, and therefore does not necessarily represent the lowest ATAR required for the course. It is the lowest *selection rank* for entry into the course, and the selection rank is made up of more than just ATAR for most applicants.

Having said that, there is a question mark around whether the current use of the cut-off in NSW and the ACT as a single number is providing the desired level of detail about entry into courses. UAC is currently working closely with member universities to improve transparency around entry requirements as part of a new model for undergraduate admissions.

A new model for university admissions

Under the new model, applicants will be informed as to the eligibility status of each of their preferences prior to every offer round. Applicants will be given their score for each of their preferences (and an explanation of how that has been derived), and the applicable course entry score for that course. Only with this knowledge can applicants make an informed/intelligent choice as to their preference order.

In addition, as part of the new model UAC will:

- provide detailed information regarding course eligibility requirements and how applicants will be selected for each
- course change the terminology from 'cut-off' to 'course entry score' to reflect the complexity of the rank and move away from current misconceptions and erroneous use of the term 'ATAR cut-off'
- provide a course entry score for every course, along with information such as:
 - the percentage of Year 12 offers made below the course entry score
 - the median ATAR and quartiles of Year 12s being offered a place in the course
 - percentage of non-Year 12s being offered a place
 - highest and lowest ATARs of Year 12s being offered a place
 - percentage of applicants being selected on the basis of criteria other than rank, etc
- provide a bonus point eligibility calculator to aggregate the plethora of bonus point information
- provide equivalences for course entry scores for some non-Year 12 qualifications (eg for those with a completed TAFE Diploma, those with one year of undergraduate degree study)
- notify applicants who will not be eligible to receive an offer to a particular preference as soon as their application has been assessed. Advice will be given as to what measures an applicant would need to take to ensure eligibility, and on any lower-level courses for which they may be eligible
- implement a very detailed and thorough communication strategy with institutions to inform potential applicants of these measures.

The other issue is around coverage, and whether the message is getting out to everyone who needs to know. We are mindful that rural and regional areas can lag behind their metropolitan counterparts in terms of understanding of university admissions. This is an area that UAC's community engagement team actively targets through annual and bi-annual visits to most rural and regional areas throughout NSW.

Question 3

Is there sufficient information about how 'bonus points' are awarded and used to adjust 'raw' ATARs sufficiently understood? Should the application of bonus points be more consistent across different institutions? Is the current variety of different bonus point rules appropriate to meet the needs of individual students and institutions?

Sufficiency of information

UAC's experience is that most potential students are sufficiently aware of bonus points due to the information provided by UAC and tertiary institutions, who are particularly strong communicators in relation to subject and regional bonus point schemes.

UAC's online platform aggregates bonus point information from its participating institutions, providing students with a central hub for ease of access to detailed information.

In terms of understanding of how bonus points are used to adjust selection ranks, UAC has been very active in this area. In all of our information and community engagement activities, we stress the operational aspects of bonus points and use basic graphics such as:

Bachelor of X at University of Y 6 applicants but only 3 places

The 6 applicants are ranked in order of their selection ranks:

APPLICANT	SELECTION RANK
1	79 (ATAR of 79)
2	78 (ATAR of 73+5 bonus points)
3	77 (ATAR of 75+2 bonus points)
4	76 (ATAR of 76)
5	75 (ATAR of 66+9 bonus points)
6	74 (ATAR of 74)

The first three applicants receive an offer. The cut-off for the course is 77 (cut-offs do not necessarily mean the lowest ATAR; the cut-off is the lowest selection rank).

From this, students, teachers and parents can see the potential power of bonus points, and the fact that the selection rank is the most important factor in gaining entry, not necessarily the ATAR alone.

Consistency of application

UAC contends that a move to greater consistency across different institutions does, of necessity, require a retrenchment of bonus point regimes. This neither represents a student-centric initiative as choices are removed or accepts the broad autonomy of institutions over their admissions policies.

In schemes such as Educational Access Schemes, the award of bonus points is very much tied to individual institution philosophies around educational disadvantage, and consistency would be neither achievable nor desirable.

Meeting needs of students and institutions

UAC believes that the current variety of different bonus points is meeting the needs of individual students and institutions, and has no suggestions for further expansion of the bonus point regime.

Question 4

Is there sufficient knowledge of the range of alternative admissions procedures employed by higher education institutions?

- Examples could include 'early' offers on the basis of previous year's cut-off or school recommendations.

Generally and publically, it has been known for some time and openly acknowledged that the ATAR is not the sole measure that universities will take into account for admission to courses of study.

Higher education institutions and UAC (especially with our centralised Schools Recommendation Schemes (SRS)) are particularly strong in promotion of alternative methods of entry. Since the introduction of the demand-driven system, universities have been actively promoting a diverse cohort.

In the *UAC Guide*, which is the primary source of admissions information for Year 12 students, institution schemes and alternative entry pathways are given primacy in an institution's entry (following some introductory text).

In terms of SRS, a recent UAC survey of schools indicated an overwhelming majority were provided with sufficient information to operate and promote the scheme to their students. Additionally, UAC leverages its strong links with careers adviser networks to increase knowledge of the scheme.

However, the growth of these schemes, and the fact that they vary from institution to institution, means that the onus is on prospective students to undertake thorough research to assess availability of the schemes, and whether particular schemes apply to them. This inevitably leads to a disparity in the level of knowledge of some groups as against others, with low-SES and rural and regional students typically exhibiting poorer understanding of the options available to them. There is always room for improvement in not only making information available, but in ensuring that it reaches the widest possible audience. UAC is mindful of this challenge, and undertakes a thorough program of school and community engagement that encompasses regional NSW.

In the non-Year 12 sphere, there is particular emphasis upon ensuring alternative pathways to higher education are promoted. Once again, the growth of these schemes and variation between institutions mean that individual research is required. The *UAC Guide*, website and *Steps 2 Study for non-Year 12 applicants* booklet all channel prospective students to detailed institution information.

Question 5

Should there be an annual report of the proportion of students accepted into courses by each higher education institution on the basis of their ATARs and/or what the median ATARs was for each course?

Current situation

In NSW and the ACT, UAC provides a cut-off for every course at the time of Main Round offers each year and in the following year's *UAC Guide*, which is published annually. The cut-off represents the lowest selection rank (not necessarily lowest ATAR)* of those applicants offered a place in the course.

UAC is currently working with its institution partners to improve the use of the cut-off; and provide additional nuance around what is required for entry into the course. This could include, but is not limited to, information about the median ATAR of those accepted into the course, and the percentage who were offered places on the basis of their ATAR alone. The terminology around the cut-off itself may also need to be adapted to reflect the in use is also being considered, with a shift from 'cut-off' to 'course entry score' to move away from current misconceptions and erroneous use of the term 'ATAR cut-off'.

This information would then be published through digital channels annually at the time of the Main Round of offers and for historical purposes in the *UAC Guide*, as per current practice.

**The selection rank is inclusive of bonus points or other ranks pertaining to additional selection criteria.*

National annual report?

In addition to the type of information currently provided by UAC (and indeed other state-based tertiary admissions centres), a national annual report would be useful for industry purposes to assist quality benchmarking/accreditation and planning and relations with media and other stakeholders, including prospective students.

Data included in an annual report should exclude instances when the pure selection rank (ATAR plus bonuses) has not been used as the determinant. The basis of the report, and therefore its applicability, should be made explicit.

The report could also acknowledge that X offers were made to this course to Year 12s on a basis other than their course entry rank, and report other metrics as deemed useful to the sector, government and applicants.

The Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres (ACTAC) would be well-placed to co-ordinate the publication of this type of national data, in whatever timeframe and in whatever format thought fit by the government and the sector.

Question 6

Do the current state-based Tertiary Admissions Centre arrangements adequately cope with students' desire for mobility to institutions across state borders? Would a more national approach to managing applications across borders be beneficial?

Current level of mobility support

UAC positively notes that the National Tertiary Admissions System has been operated by ACTAC since 1995 (<http://www.actac.edu.au/ntas.html>). Highlights of the system include:

- common closing dates and agreed dates in January for the publication of, and response to, main round offers such that applicants who have applied in more than one state/territory are not required to respond until all main offers have been made
- release of Year 12 results
- national approach to the calculation of tertiary entrance rank equivalences across states in 1997
- eligibility of interstate applicants (the notion of 'home state rule' was adopted meaning that if an applicant meets minimum tertiary entrance requirements for all institutions in their home state/territory they will meet minimum tertiary entrance requirements for all interstate Australian institutions subject to ATAR/OP and individual course requirements).

Furthermore, all TACs have online applications and UAC in particular is a leader in terms of digital functionality and support, which promotes mobility from other states and territories to institutions within NSW and ACT.

National approach?

A national admissions centre would benefit students making multi-state applications, but these are relatively few (interstate undergraduate applications via UAC represent 7% of the total). In Australia, culturally and historically, the majority of students are connected to their home state and seek university admission within that state.

The current state-based arrangements reflect the strong links between admissions centres and their state Year 12 issuing authorities. Unless and until there is a common Australian Year 12 qualification, the current state arrangements may be the most appropriate.

In addition, a national admissions centre would need to garner the support and co-operation of all universities across Australia, which may be impracticable.

Question 7

Is there an understanding of how such mechanisms as early offers, second round offers and forced offers affect the transparency of higher education entry? How, if at all, should these factors be dealt with for the purposes of transparency?

Early offers before ATAR and Main Round

As indicated by the answer to Question 4, UAC and institutions widely promote early entry schemes (such as SRS) and highlight that admission through these schemes is typically based on factors other than the ATAR.

These offers are made prior to release of the ATAR and the Main Round.

In recent years 'early' offers before the Main Round have grown. Nearly 31,000 offers prior to the Main Round this year were made through UAC, up 9% on 2015 figures and 35% on 2014.

Second round offers

Second round offers (presumably offers made in the round following Main Round) use the same mix of criteria as at the Main Round.

Applicants do, however, need to be aware that different factors will influence their eligibility during the admissions period (ie some rounds use different criteria).

Forced offers

Forced offers are at an institution's discretion. Potential inputs into their decision-making (such as interview/ additional requirements) should be defined for all applicants; this is being considered as part of the new model for undergraduate admissions currently being developed by UAC.

Transparency

In the new model for undergraduate admissions UAC is developing with partner institutions, information about entry requirements for each course will be made available for each offer round, including early offer rounds.

Question 8

What information or enhancements do you think should be added to the Australian Government's Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) website?

The mandate and unique attraction of the QILT website is the collation and publication of the student experience survey as given by recent students and graduates. Recent enhancements have expanded that range of data available; and this is very useful for the sector and prospective students. Given one of its mandates is to help students find the best course for them, any further enhancements that assist that process would be welcome, but UAC does not have any specific recommendations.

It should be recognised that the type of information best found on the QILT website is quite different to the information on state-based admissions centre websites. The UAC website is the primary aggregating website for admissions information, which accords with a student-centric user experience as it is also the point of application.

However, given that both QILT and the admissions centres are concerned with helping prospective higher education students, they are complementary and each potentially has a valuable traffic-driving role to the other. There could also be useful cooperation on national admissions data between QILT, state-based admissions centres and the Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres (ACTAC).

QILT could take the same approach as it does with Study Assist and questions of finance, with core/agreed information (so that there are no conflicts to confuse users) as the basis, guiding prospective students to each TAC website.

Question 9

How best should comparable information on student admissions procedures be made available to the public? What is the most appropriate and effective way to communicate information to students? What information or enhancements do you think should be added to Tertiary Admission Centre websites, university and non-university institution websites, and/or Australian Government websites such as QILT and Study Assist?

To assist with decision-making, prospective students require access to accurate, timely and comprehensible information about the courses available, the institutions offering those courses, and the selection methods used by those institutions for admissions purposes.

Other consumer-centric industries

This information must be clear, consistent and comparable. For inspiration on methods of packaging this information we could look to existing practices such as the Standard Information Statements required for each product offered by a health fund or the Critical Information Summaries used by telecommunications companies.

Search functionality

In NSW and the ACT, the information would be best served via a new unified search function on UAC's homepage. Visitors could self-identify, selecting between different levels of study or different demographic categories. The search should feature intelligent filtering options, predictive completion and support long tail semantic search. Users would be able to add results to a persistent shortlist to enable ease of comparison.

Search results would contain uniform information and include evaluation tools such as ranking utilities and graphical outputs such as charts to aid users with their interpretation of data.

The search would act as a 'one-stop shop' for admissions, enabling applicants to find information not just about admissions criteria and support services, but also rich course information similar to that found in UAC's existing course descriptions. The search results would be integrated with surrounding contextual information determined by the audience type selected at the beginning of the search.

Shortlisted collections of information would be made available in downloadable packages which would provide a front-page summary of all policies, procedures, cut-offs and other high-level course information. Other pages would include more detailed information for each course and contact information to enable applicant follow up.

Audience awareness

Students, parents or teachers could be made aware of the existence of the admissions information via outreach and traditional and digital marketing. Community engagement activities would promote the service in person and targeted electronic marketing on social media, using PPC (pay-per-click) campaigns, or through re-marketing advertising would provide a cost-effective way to zero in and inform specific audiences.

UAC as primary information provider

UAC is best placed to offer this information to applicants and users in NSW and the ACT as we possess the most up-to-date and comprehensive information about courses, have established relationships with providers, and have a history of being independent and impartial. An information-sharing partnership with QILT and other related entities could provide prospective students with a complete information package on admissions, course info, student satisfaction and course outcomes.

Question 10

What special measures are needed to ensure equity of access for disadvantaged students?

UAC currently operates two schemes for disadvantaged students – Educational Access Schemes (EAS) and Equity Scholarships (ES). EAS give consideration to applicants who have suffered one or more of 25 different types of disadvantage during Years 11 and 12 which seriously affect their educational performance. Outside of this group, individual institutions have their own schemes to recognise social disadvantage. ES provide financially-disadvantaged students with the money they need to help them attend university.

Both schemes are extensive, mature and entrenched with excellent levels of communication, institution and school support.

Because these schemes are run by UAC, applicants need only submit one application for consideration by all universities in NSW and the ACT. Applicants are given information about how each institution will consider their application, given that this varies from institution to institution and sometimes between courses within institutions.

UAC does not identify any special measures in addition to those contained within the EAS and ES regimes. Clearly, the ultimate success of these schemes rests with each institution, who must provide the appropriate level of support to successful applicants, relative to the nature of their disadvantage, to ensure their meaningful participation and successful completion.

Question 11

Can you suggest any other changes that would improve public awareness and understanding of tertiary admissions processes?

UAC identifies the main issue as improvements to answering the questions of 'What do I need to get in?' This is one of the central questions UAC is addressing with the new model for undergraduate admissions – more detailed and meaningful information to applicants is a key pillar of the model.

Under the new model, applicants will be informed as to the eligibility status of each of their preferences prior to every offer round. Applicants will be given their course entry score for each of their preferences (and an explanation of how that has been derived), and the applicable course entry score for that course. Only with this knowledge can applicants make an informed/intelligent choice as to their preference order.

In addition, as part of the new model UAC will:

- provide detailed information regarding course eligibility requirements and how applicants will be selected for each course
- change the terminology from 'cut-off' to 'course entry score' to reflect the complexity of the rank and move away from current misconceptions and erroneous use of the term 'ATAR cut-off'
- provide a course entry score for every course, along with information such as:
 - the percentage of Year 12 offers made below the course entry score
 - the median ATAR and quartiles of Year 12s being offered a place in the course
 - percentage of non-Year 12s being offered a place
 - highest and lowest ATARs of Year 12s being offered a place
 - percentage of applicants being selected on the basis of criteria other than rank, etc
- provide a bonus point eligibility calculator to aggregate the plethora of bonus point information
- provide equivalences for course entry scores for some non-Year 12 qualifications (eg for those with a completed TAFE Diploma, those with one year of undergraduate degree study)
- notify applicants who will not be eligible to receive an offer to a particular preference as soon as their application has been assessed. Advice will be given as to what measures an applicant would need to take to ensure eligibility, and on any lower level courses for which they may be eligible
- implement a very detailed and thorough communication strategy with institutions to inform potential applicants of these measures.