

4 Walker Street
West Beach WA 6450
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Higher Education Standards Panel

Dear Panel Members

Re: Consultation on Higher Education Admissions Processes

I would like to make some comments as a parent of a 2015 ATAR student who started University in WA this year.

In the section on Context, the Minister for Education and Training “is concerned about the capacity of some students to complete their courses”. The following section Pathways to Higher Education states that only 31% of University submissions were admitted based on their secondary education with ATAR. And that 13% of University admissions were admitted based on their secondary education without ATAR.

Questions I think need to be asked:

- Has the number of students gaining admission into University with an ATAR declined? Why?
- Why are Universities needing to create so many alternative pathways?
- Why are students not doing the harder ATAR subjects?
- Why are students choosing to do less ATAR subjects?

It is great that there are lots of ways to get to University but I think the current ATAR system in WA at least, is not encouraging and nurturing students to pursue further education. And I think they are not preparing students well enough for University.

I did the Higher Education Certificate in NSW in 1981. We completed Year 12 and did our examinations. Our Aggregate Mark was based on the exam marks only from 5 subjects and was used to gain admission into a course at University. During Year 12, my school friends and I played sport, had part time jobs and socialised. There was little stress at our public school. Many of us went on to University and had successful careers.

In contrast my child in 2015 completed Western Australian Certificate of Education. The ATAR is based on the combination of the examination mark and the moderated school mark for 4 subjects. The school mark for a subject is moderated (using the exam marks as a guide) so it is comparable from school to school. This process relies on the teacher’s assessments and the student’s final exam marks to be very similar. Plus the students ranking in the exam marks needs to be similar to their ranking in the school marks to minimise how much

school marks are moderated. Small class sizes, underperformance in exams or school and inaccurate or inconsistent teacher assessments can all have a big impact on the moderated school marks.

The result of the moderation of school marks process is that schools are being very strict on who can do ATAR subjects, not encouraging borderline students to continue. Many students are still maturing and improve in their academic studies through Year 11 and 12, especially boys.

Schools are putting unreasonable pressure on students in Year 12. Every test, practical and assignment in Year 12 is important for the final school mark. Students are aware that their performance may affect the results of the rest the class. This creates a very stressful year. And a stressful Year 12 does not encourage students to take up further study.

I would imagine that this was not the intended purpose of incorporating the school results and the exams results. Some parents have commented to me that they did not encourage their children to do ATAR because of the pressure and stress.

Plus in the pursuit of more consistent and higher results in subjects, students are not encouraged to do harder subjects. Even though these subjects are what students need to be well prepared for University. Students are also choosing to do less ATAR subjects as only 4 are required to get an ATAR.

So competent students are being lost to the University system. And students are being underprepared for University. This at a time when Universities seem to be begging for students.

I think the current ATAR system it is bureaucracy gone mad. It's a ridiculous unnecessarily complex process. Perhaps they need to go back to just exams for ATAR and let students who do not do well in exams go through bridging courses.

Yours sincerely

Julie Withers