



Professor Peter Shergold
Chair, Higher Education Standards Panel
c/- Higher Education Standards Panel Secretariat
Canberra ACT 2601

By email: HigherEd@education.gov.au

Dear Professor Shergold

RE: TRANSPARENCY OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS PROCESSES

The University of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Higher Education Standards Panel (the Panel) on the issues raised in the consultation paper on transparency of higher education admissions processes.

It is essential that prospective students, their families, schools and policy makers have confidence in the selection criteria and processes adopted by autonomous and self-accrediting universities. To that end, the University supports the 10 principles outlined in the Panel's consultation paper. University admissions processes should be readily accessible and transparently disclosed to students and their families making decisions about course selection. The integrity of admissions processes rely upon them being consistently applied and disclosed in a form that enables comparison between institutions and courses.

The University commends to the Panel the *Go8 Statement on the key principles on the transparency in admission at Go8 universities*. The Statement offers a framework that can provide for greater transparency of admissions criteria regardless of the practices adopted by various institutions. We also recommend that principles of transparency should apply to all admissions pathways, criteria, methods and instruments and be broadly comparable between institutions. For example, a standard definition of ATAR should be determined such that ATAR references relate to unadjusted ATARs and any 'adjusted' ATAR generated for university decision-making should be clearly disclosed.

Recommendations to improve transparency

The University also strongly supports the recommendations to improve transparency made in the Go8 submission to the Panel¹, namely that:

1. All institutions should make publicly available their admissions criteria and standards in a manner that is consistent with the Go8 Transparency Statement.
2. This information should be easy to find, in plain language, and in terms that are readily understood in the community. It should be readily accessible in the primary locations used to provide course information, including TAC guides and institutional course information websites and should cover all admission pathways including those intended to ensure equity of access for students who have experienced, or are experiencing, disadvantage.

¹ Group of Eight submission to the Higher Education Standards Panel *Review of transparency of higher education admissions processes*, 24 May 2016

3. Each of the primary locations used to provide course information should provide reference to an authoritative, plain language explanation of all relevant selection criteria, methods and instruments and their use in admission.
4. Any student, anywhere in Australia, should be able to access full information on course offerings in all States and Territories, and apply to be offered a place in a course.
5. Universities and the TACs should be encouraged to identify a process and mechanism by which students make a single application and make a single payment to apply for admission to Australian university courses, irrespective of the TACs through which specific course admission is administered.
6. The provision of better and more transparent information regarding admission processes and procedures should be a matter of direct responsibility for institutions without requiring burdensome regulatory red-tape.
7. Data on student retention and progression within courses of study should be provided on the QILT website.

The University of Melbourne's undergraduate admission criteria

The University of Melbourne seeks to create a high achieving, socially inclusive student community and its admission criteria and practices are designed accordingly. The University believes that data on the relationship between admission criteria and future student retention, progression and success are vital in building evidence-based admission practices across the sector.

To ensure admissions practice remains robust and effective, the University regularly reviews its admissions practices and its communication to prospective students. The University has monitored the academic performance of its undergraduate students using Weighted Average Mark (WAM) and other measures of successful outcomes. The findings from these analyses show that the University's undergraduate selection practices and selection criteria are appropriate and effective in creating a high achieving and diverse student community.

Our analyses show that ATAR is an important and reliable predictor of the potential of students to succeed and thrive academically at the University of Melbourne. ATAR correlates with WAM and the likelihood of progression to postgraduate study. The ATAR-WAM correlation is strongest for higher ATAR ranks—ATAR is clearly a mechanism for identifying students with the highest academic potential.

Admissions and access

The University of Melbourne's Access Melbourne program, which includes guaranteed entry for students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds and students from rural or isolated backgrounds who achieve an ATAR explicit threshold, is also a highly effective component of the University's admissions.²

Access Melbourne admits students across a wider range of social and academic backgrounds whose ATAR perhaps underestimates their potential for academic performance at the University. On average, Access Melbourne students achieve higher WAMs than non-Access Melbourne students. Access Melbourne contributes significantly to the overall academic performance of the University.

The University monitors the changing context for higher education selection and admissions and will continue to regularly conduct systematic reviews of the relationship between selection criteria and student performance.

² http://futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/admissions/access_melbourne_and_equity_programs/access-melbourne

Other pathways

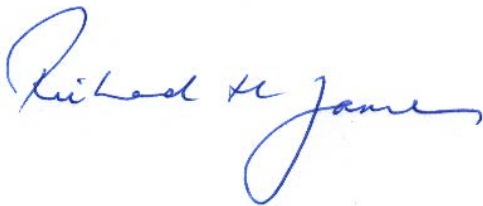
In addition to the ATAR-only pathway, the University adopts two other pathways:

ATAR + other criteria pathway – this is relevant where additional information is required, such as auditions and portfolios, for specific courses of study; and

Other pathways – this is particularly relevant to the Melbourne Curriculum Model, which offers six foundation bachelor degrees and a post graduate pathway into professional entry qualifications. Teacher education, for example, is a post graduate degree at Melbourne and ATAR is not a relevant consideration for selection of students into graduate degrees, but rather performance in an undergraduate degree. The University has also developed a Teacher Selector tool to ensure those best suited to a career in teaching are selected for the course of study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on (03) 8344 7627 or r.james@unimelb.edu.au should the Panel wish to discuss in more detail the University's submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard H. James". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'R'.

Professor Richard James
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
The University of Melbourne

27 May 2016