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SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO AUSTRALIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION COMMISSION CONSULTATION PAPER

AUSTRALASIAN CONFERENCE OF TERTIARY ADMISSIONS CENTRES (ACTAC)

ACTAC: coordinating consistent admissions nationwide

The Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admissions Centres (ACTAC) comprises the five state and territory admissions centres in Australia, as well as the University of Tasmania. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority is also a participant in ACTAC processes.

ACTAC facilitates coordination and sharing of practice between tertiary admissions centres to benefit learners and providers and assist interstate student mobility. ACTAC welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback in response to the **Australian Tertiary Education Commission** consultation paper.

ACTAC is pleased to engage with these significant proposals and keen to work with the Department of Education, sector stakeholders, and the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) once established to ensure the success of future implementation.

Meeting local needs through state tertiary admissions centres

While admissions centres operate in some international environments, Australia is unique in having a consistent national admissions system operated by state-based admissions centres, balancing consistency with diversity and responsiveness to local conditions and requirements. This model allows individual state admissions centres to work closely with their local stakeholders and respective state/territory curriculum authorities to best meet the specific local needs of learners and providers, and facilitates national consistency where it's useful, such as ensuring the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is consistent between states. The ATAR and IB Admissions Score (IBAS), both calculated by ACTAC members, provide a portable academic credential to enable interstate mobility. ACTAC also supports government with initiatives such as the Higher Education Standards Panel's Admissions Transparency projects and the implementation of the Unique Student Identifier (USI).

This model, including collaboration facilitated through ACTAC, provides the infrastructure to support students accessing courses nationwide while allowing each state and territory to meet the different approaches and priorities of each state's curriculum body. This model also provides personalised support to students, schools, and tertiary providers. The TACs represent a long-standing effective and efficient shared service model for the tertiary education sector, providing significant benefit for students and providers in each state and territory. ACTAC is in a unique position to provide expert advice on a range of admissions matters to the Department and in future to the ATEC.

Establishment of the ATEC

ACTAC members look forward to working with the ATEC and its Commissioners to achieve positive outcomes for students and providers. ACTAC has the capacity to work with the ATEC on a range of matters, with admissions being crucial to each of the proposed ATEC functions (stewardship, funding and pricing, policy, and performance).

ACTAC and its members note the collegial and collaborative approach of tertiary institutions across jurisdictions and encourage the Department to capitalise on the expertise within the sector when considering the appointment of Commissioners.

Recommendations:

- Recognise the ACTAC Convenor as a 'consulted official' in the charter of the ATEC to enable admissions expertise and data to inform ATEC activities.
- Recognise the value of the significant expertise held within the sector by allowing at least one current or recent sector leader to be appointed as a Commissioner, noting their obligations to disclose any conflicts of interest

Tertiary admissions centres have a key role to play in informing data-driven policy and decisions

Tertiary admissions centres hold a wealth of admissions and outcome data which can drive informed policy and operational decisions. ACTAC encourages the Department and ATEC to engage with ACTAC and its member TACs to leverage this important data.

TACs are also well-placed to build consolidated datasets nationally and within each jurisdiction. Increasing numbers of applications made direct to tertiary institutions means increased complexity for government and researchers in understanding the full picture of the admissions landscape. ACTAC recommends the establishment of a formal role for TACs in collecting data on direct applications from all tertiary institutions to enable the provision of real-time data which provides a complete, integrated view of student behaviour and outcomes.

Consolidation of admissions data through integration by TACs is particularly important in understanding the needs, behaviour, and outcomes for students from equity backgrounds. TACs can already provide early data, with information available as soon as an applicant enters course preferences, and integration of data from direct applications will provide a complete picture of the landscape for equity students.

TACs work together closely via ACTAC and are able to present national data to support the Department and the ATEC in making timely and responsive policy and operational decisions.

Recommendations:

- Leverage the data held by tertiary admissions centres to support timely and responsive decision-making for the sector
- Establish a formal process for the collection of direct application data by tertiary admissions centres

A more integrated tertiary system starts at the point of application

The Accord final report rightly notes that barriers between VET and higher education do not serve students well, and it is pleasing to see greater alignment between VET and higher education listed as a priority outcome in the ATEC implementation paper. While there are many factors to consider in promoting a single, integrated system, one key driver of integration is to enable easy and seamless access to both sectors through a single application system. In some states, VET courses are already available to TAC applicants via their course preferences, but more should be done to encourage all tertiary providers to make their courses available to students via tertiary admissions centres.

The increased availability of VET courses through TACs would help to foster improved perceptions of VET amongst prospective students and their parents and encourage broader consideration of tertiary options. The ability to build in pathway courses in a single preference list provides students with more confidence that there are options available to help them realise their study goals. Some TACs already provide 'slip back' offers which make relevant pathway courses available to applicants who do not meet eligibility requirements for their desired course, a positive intervention which provides a meaningful study option.

Recommendations:

- Foster greater tertiary alignment by encouraging a single point of application for VET and higher education courses in each jurisdiction
- Support TAFE institutes and other VET providers to engage with tertiary admissions centres to enable prospective students to benefit from the services and resources provided by TACs

ACTAC and ATEC: an opportunity to drive positive change

ACTAC members look forward to engaging with the Department and the ATEC to deliver positive outcomes for students, government and the sector, including in the provision of a national consistent framework to achieve key policy objectives. ACTAC convenes regular meetings of TAC leaders and would be pleased to welcome representatives from the Department and ATEC at a future meeting. For further information and to arrange follow-up discussions, please contact ACTAC Convenor and VTAC CEO Teresa Tjja:

