



Australian Government
Department of Education,
Skills and Employment

Undergraduate applications, offers and acceptances 2021

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Introduction

Purpose of the report

To identify trends in numbers of applications, offers and acceptances and the characteristics of applicants, showing the demand for higher education in 2021.

This report analyses data on applications, offers and acceptances for university admission for the first semester of the 2021 academic year, as of 15 May 2021.

Overview of the data

Data are derived from the University Applications and Offers Data Collection. The data refer to domestic undergraduate student applications, offers and acceptances as of 15 May 2021. It consists of data on:

- applications and offers processed through Tertiary Admissions Centres (TACs), and
- applications made directly to universities and resulting offers.

The full data is available in visual analytics form on the department's website, along with previous Applications and offers reports and data at: <https://www.education.gov.au/undergraduate-applications-offers-and-acceptances-publications>

In 2007, the Queensland Government introduced an additional year of schooling before Year 1 with only a half-cohort of students enrolling that year. As a result of the Queensland half-year cohort effect, the number of Year 12 students in Queensland in 2019 was around 30 per cent less than the previous year leading to lower applications for higher education among Queensland school leavers in 2020. In 2021, the half-year cohort effect in 2020 has been reversed and applications from Queensland school leavers have increased. As a result, much of this report provides year on year comparisons without Queensland data processed through Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) so as to compare like with like.

Acknowledgements

The department would like to thank all officers of TACs and universities for submitting high quality applications and offers data for the 2021 academic year.

Highlights

Application numbers

- The actual number of individuals applying either through a TAC (excluding Queensland TAC applicants) or directly for a university place in 2021 was 295,095, an increase of 2.3 per cent on the previous year. This follows an increase of 1.2 per cent in 2020.
- Direct applicants made up 40.0 per cent of total applicants in 2021.

Offer numbers

- There were 241,558 unique offers made in 2021, an increase of 1.2 per cent on the previous year. This follows an increase of 1.3 per cent in 2020.
- Direct offers accounted for 38.6 per cent of total offers in 2021.

Offer rate

- The offer rate measures the way in which universities choose to respond to student demand.
- In 2021, the offer rate was 81.9 per cent, down from 82.8 per cent in 2020 and 83.6 per cent in 2019 and was the lowest offer rate since 80.8 per cent in 2011.

Table 1: Growth in applicants, offers and offer rate, 2010-2021

Australia	Applicants	Offers	Offer rate
2010			80.2%
2011	3.3 %	4.0 %	80.8%
2012	2.4 %	4.9 %	82.8%
2013	2.3 %	4.2 %	84.4%
2014*	2.6 %	1.8 %	83.8%
2015*	3.9 %	2.9 %	83.5%
2016*	1.7 %	1.6 %	83.5%
2017	1.6 %	0.1 %	82.5%
2018	-2.6 %	-1.9 %	83.8%
2019**	-1.3 %	-1.5 %	83.6%
2020**	1.2 %	1.3 %	82.8%
2021**	2.3 %	1.2 %	81.9%

*Excluding WA data for the 'half-year' Year 12 cohort effect in 2015.

** Excluding Queensland data for the 'half-year' Year 12 cohort effect in 2020.

Acceptances and deferrals

- There were 165,675 applicants who accepted an offer in 2021, a decrease of 1.4 per cent compared with 2020.
- Of all applicants who received offers in 2021, 13,999 or 8.4 per cent deferred their offer, much lower than the deferral rate of 11.3 per cent in 2020. The lower rate of deferrals is most likely related to the downturn in labour market conditions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. With fewer job opportunities available, applicants are more likely to proceed to study and less likely to defer their offer. Also, COVID-19 restrictions on mobility limiting the ability to undertake travel or undertake a gap year may also have contributed to a lower rate of deferrals.

Breakdown by key factors

State and territory

- Except Tasmania (-13.8 per cent), South Australia (-3.1 per cent) and Victoria (-0.6 per cent), all states and territories recorded an increase in applications. Queensland recorded the largest increase (10.6 per cent), followed by the ACT (6.3 per cent), NSW (4.1 per cent), Northern Territory (3.6 per cent) and Western Australia (3.1 per cent).
- Compared to 2020, the following states and territories recorded a decrease in offers, Tasmania (-10.0 per cent), SA (-2.7 per cent), Victoria (-2.2 per cent), and WA (-2.0 per cent) and NT (-0.9 per cent). Queensland (10.7 per cent), the ACT (5.4 per cent) and NSW (2.9 per cent) recorded an increase in offers.
- The offer rate in 2021 was 81.9 per cent, a decrease of 0.9 percentage points from the previous year. Tasmania recorded the highest offer rate, 93.4 per cent, while on the other hand WA recorded the lowest offer rate, 74.6 per cent, in 2021.
- Offer rates decreased in WA (-3.9 percentage points), followed by Victoria (-1.2 percentage points), NSW (-1.0 percentage points) and the ACT (-0.7 percentage points) in 2021. On the other hand, Tasmania recorded the largest increase in offer rate (4.0 percentage points), followed by SA (0.4 percentage points) and Queensland (0.1 percentage points).

Year 12 and Non-Year 12 applicants

- Nationally, Year 12 applicants decreased by 5.6 per cent in 2021 while the number of non-Year 12 applicants increased by 7.2 per cent.
- Nationally, Year 12 applications represented 35.1 per cent of total applications.
- The number of offers to Year 12 applicants decreased by 6.0 per cent while the number of offers to non-Year 12 applicants increased by 6.1 per cent.
- Nationally, Year 12 offers represented 37.9 per cent of total offers.
- The offer rate for Year 12 applicants was 88.3 per cent which was higher than the offer rate of 78.4 per cent for non-Year 12 applicants.

Field of education

- Nationally, the most popular broad field of education (in terms of the number of applications) in 2021 was Health (84,071 applicants or 28.5 per cent of all applicants). This was followed by Society and Culture (70,471 applicants or 23.9 per cent) and Management and Commerce (29,984 applicants or 10.2 per cent).
- Fields of education that recorded strongest growth in applications in 2021 were Health (12.6 per cent), followed by Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies (7.3 per cent), Information Technology (2.2 per cent), Engineering and Related Technologies (2.0 per cent), and Society and Culture (1.2 per cent).
- On the other hand, fields of education that experienced the largest declines in applications were Management and Commerce (-8.1 per cent), followed by Creative Arts (-6.1 per cent), Natural and Physical Sciences (-1.6 per cent) and Education (-0.4 per cent).

- Society and Culture received the largest number of offers (61,497 or 25.5 per cent of total offers). This was followed by Health (57,908 or 24.0 per cent of total offers).
- The following fields of education recorded increases in offers: Health (7.8 per cent), followed by Engineering and Related Technologies (5.1 per cent), Information Technology (3.9 per cent), Architecture and Building (2.2 per cent) and Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies (0.3 per cent). On the other hand, Management and Commerce (-10.2 per cent), followed by Creative Arts (-6.1 per cent), Education (-0.7 per cent) and Natural and Physical Sciences and (-0.6 per cent) recorded decreases in offers in 2021.
- Natural and Physical Sciences had the highest offer rate at 95.3 per cent, an increase of 0.9 percentage points in 2021. Health recorded the lowest offer rate of 68.9 per cent in 2021. Engineering and Related Technologies experienced the largest increase in the offer rate in 2021 of 2.6 percentage points to 89.7 per cent.

Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)

- The average ATAR of applicants receiving an offer increased marginally from 76.8 in 2020 to 77.2 in 2021.

Table 2: Average ATAR for those receiving an offer, 2010- 2021

Average ATAR	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
All Courses	79.9	78.9	78.4	77.7	76.7	76.5	76.4	76.6	76.5	77.4	76.8	77.2

- In 2021, 26.2 per cent of all offers made to applicants were for those with an ATAR of at least 70.05. Offers to applicants who achieved an ATAR above 90 accounted for 10.0 per cent of all offers.
- The share of offers for applicants in the ATAR band 50.00 or less declined from 2.7 per cent in 2020 to 2.6 per cent in 2021.
- The share of offers for applicants with no ATAR or who were non-Year 12 applicants was 61.9 per cent in 2021, up from 60.5 per cent in 2020.
- Offer rates for applicants in the ATAR band 50.00 or less have increased from 41.1 per cent in 2014 to 54.6 per cent in 2021.
- The offer rates for the top three ATAR bands (deciles) have remained relatively steady within a range of 97 per cent to 98 per cent.
- The likelihood of an applicant with a low ATAR receiving an offer has recorded a greater increase than an applicant with a higher ATAR. In part, this is because offer rates for applicants with a higher ATAR are starting from a higher base so there is less scope for an increase in offer rates.
- Fields of education with an above average share of offers for applicants in the ATAR band 90.05 or more were Engineering and Related Technologies (22.3 per cent), Natural and Physical Sciences (19.1 per cent) and Management and Commerce (11.7 per cent) and Society and Culture (9.5 per cent).
- Fields of education with an above average share of offers for applicants in the ATAR band 50.00 or less were Architecture and Building (4.6 per cent), Information Technology and Education (both at 3.6 per cent), Management and Commerce and Society and Culture (both 3.1 per cent) and Creative Arts (2.8 per cent).

Underrepresented groups

- In 2021, applicants from a low SES background recorded a larger increase (3.9 per cent) in applications than applicants from a medium SES background (3.8 per cent) and applicants from high SES backgrounds (2.7 per cent).
- In 2021, offers to applicants from a low SES background increased by 5.0 per cent, followed by those from a medium SES background (3.5 per cent) and high SES background (0.6 per cent).
- Applicants from a low SES background were less likely to receive an offer. Their offer rate was 81.6 per cent compared with 81.9 per cent for applicants from a medium SES background and 83.2 per cent for applicants from a high SES background in 2021.
- In 2021, applications from metropolitan residents increased by 4.5 per cent while applications from non-metropolitan residents decreased by 0.1 per cent.
- Offers made to metropolitan applicants increased by 3.7 per cent compared with an increase of 0.3 per cent in offers made to non-metropolitan applicants.
- Applications from non-metropolitan residents were more likely to result in an offer compared with applications from metropolitan residents, 84.7 per cent and 81.5 per cent respectively.
- Nationally, there were 6230 applicants from an Indigenous background, a decrease of 1.2 per cent compared with 2020. This represents 2.1 per cent of all applications.
- Offers to Indigenous applicants decreased by 1.3 per cent to 4945 in 2021.
- 79.4 per cent of applicants from an Indigenous background had attracted an offer in 2021. This is a decrease of 0.1 percentage points compared with the same period last year. The offer rate for non-Indigenous applicants was 81.0 per cent in 2021, a decrease of 2.1 percentage points over 2020.

University groups

- Except the Australian Technology Network (ATN) (-6.6 percent decline), all other university groups recorded positive growth in applications in 2021: Innovative Research Universities (IRU) (11.4 per cent), followed by Regional Universities Network (RUN) (6.8 per cent) and Group of Eight (Go8) (2.6 per cent).
- In terms of offers, a similar pattern was observed among the university groups. The IRU (19.5 per cent), followed by RUN (2.9 per cent) and Go8 (1.0 per cent) recorded positive growth in offers while the ATN observed decreases in offers (-5.8 per cent).
- Applications to Go8 universities and ATN universities were least likely to receive an offer in 2021, offer rates of 70.6 per cent and 77.9 per cent respectively, reflecting the higher entry requirements at these universities.
- The offer rate decreased for the RUN and Go8 universities (-3.3 percentage points and -1.1 percentage points respectively) in 2021. IRU universities recorded an increase in offer rates (6.4 percentage points) while the offer rate for ATN universities increased by 0.6 per cent in 2021.

Data Qualifications

The data referred to in this report contains applications and offers for domestic undergraduate university places through TACs and universities as of 15 May 2021.

It should be noted that:

- Applications and offers data in this report refer to TAC data and applications made directly to universities.
- Only applications made to Table A institutions and the University of Notre Dame Australia (Table B) are included in the analysis.
- The data does not include applications from overseas students.
- All references to “applications” (in TAC data) in this report relate to highest preference applications.
- A small proportion of applicants make applications to more than one TAC resulting in some double counting of applicants.
- All references to “2021” in this report relate to the 2021 submission through TACs and the data submission on applications made directly to universities as of 15 May for the first semester of the 2021 academic year.
- All references to “Year 12” applicants in this report relate to applicants who attempted an Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA) Year 12 program or the International Baccalaureate in the year of application.
- While completing Year 12 and gaining a tertiary entrance score is the most common way to gain entry to university, TACs and universities take a number of other qualifications into consideration, particularly for adults applying who have not recently completed Year 12. Some pathways to gaining entry to a university degree include sitting the Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT), articulating from certificate and/or diploma level studies in vocational education and training (VET), university bridging or foundation programs and previous higher education (completed or commenced).
- 2015 and 2016 applications and offers data were affected by the ‘half-year’ Year 12 cohort in Western Australia (WA). The ‘half-year’ cohort arose due to the Western Australian State Government changing the starting age for school children in 2003. The change was legislated by the WA School Education Act of 1999. Until 2003, children began Year 1 at the beginning of the calendar year when they turned six. From 2003, children began Year 1 if they turned six between 1 July of the previous year and 30 June of the year they started school. This policy change was introduced as a one-off. That is, there was no staggered implementation across years, which meant that in 2003 only children born between 1 January 1997 and 30 June 1997 started school. This small cohort worked its way through the school system reaching Year 12 in 2014. The Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC – the TAC in WA) estimated that it is more likely that the number of students with an ATAR was around 60 per cent of the size of a normal cohort of students. This considerably impacted WA’s university application numbers for the 2015 academic year with the reversal of this effect occurring in the 2016 academic year.

- One university excluded medical applications from 2018. Hence, the percentage change in applications from 2017 to 2018 is calculated excluding that particular university's medical applications from 2017 data.
- 2020 and 2021 applications and offers data were affected by the 'half-year' Year 12 cohort in Queensland (QLD). In 2007, the Queensland government introduced an additional year of schooling before Year 1 with only a half-cohort of students enrolling that year. As a result of the Queensland half-year cohort effect, the number of Year 12 students in Queensland in 2019 was around 30 per cent less than the previous year leading to lower applications for higher education among Queensland school leavers in 2020. The reversal of the 'half cohort' effect resulted in higher applications for higher education among Queensland school leavers in 2021. As a result, figures in this report showing the change in applications between 2020 and 2021 exclude applications and offers from the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) due to the need to compare 'like with like'. Inclusion of QTAC data would have led to a national increase of 4.5 per cent in applications and a 2.6 per cent increase in offers in 2021, noting this is like comparing 'apples with oranges'.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Australasian Curriculum Assessment Certification Authorities (ACACA) Year 12 programs	<p>Each State has its own approved Year 12 program. ACACA is the national body responsible for monitoring senior secondary curricula and certification in Australia and New Zealand. ACACA Year 12 programs may be undertaken in schools, VET institutions or higher education providers. Current programs by state are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Higher School Certificate • Victorian Certificate of Education, • Queensland Certificate of Education • Queensland Senior Certificate • Western Australian Certificate of Education • South Australian Certificate of Education • Tasmanian Certificate of Education • ACT Year 12 Certificate • Northern Territory Certificate of Education.
Current Year 12 applicant	An applicant who attempted an ACACA Year 12 program or the International Baccalaureate in the year of application.
Offer rate	The offer rate is a percentage calculated as the number of valid offers made to applicants with at least one valid preference divided by the number of applicants with at least one valid preference.

University Groups

Australian Technology Network (ATN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curtin University of Technology • Deakin University¹ • RMIT University • University of South Australia • University of Technology, Sydney
Group of Eight (Go8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monash University • The Australian National University • The University of Adelaide • The University of Melbourne • The University of New South Wales • The University of Queensland • The University of Sydney • The University of Western Australia
Innovative Research Universities (IRU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charles Darwin University • Flinders University of South Australia • Griffith University • James Cook University • La Trobe University • Murdoch University • Western Sydney University

¹ Deakin University joined the Australian Technology Network universities on 8 December 2020. For comparison purposes Deakin University is included in the ATN group in 2020 as well as 2021.

Term	Definition
Regional Universities Network (RUN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charles Sturt University • Central Queensland University • Southern Cross University • Federation University of Australia • University of New England • University of Southern Queensland • University of Sunshine Coast
Non-aligned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Catholic University • Edith Cowan University • Macquarie University • Swinburne University of Technology • Queensland University of Technology • University of Canberra • The University of Newcastle • University of Tasmania • University of Wollongong • Victoria University