Australian Government

Improving the transparency of higher education admissions:

Joint higher education sector and Australian Government implementation plan

Consultation Draft

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Endorsements

This joint implementation plan has been formally endorsed by and has the support and commitment of the following organisations:

[Organisation name] [LOGO]

[Organisation name] [LOGO]

This page will contain the names and logos of the key higher education and senior secondary education sector organisations that agree to endorse and commit to adopting the terms of the implementation plan.

Introduction

In October 2016, following extensive consultation with higher education and secondary education stakeholders, the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) released its report *Improving the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions*. The HESP made 14 recommendations intended to:

- achieve greater transparency through the use of common language about admissions processes and the publication of consistent information
- widen the accessibility of information to prospective students
- improve the comparability of information available from providers about their admissions processes and entry requirements
- enhance the accountability of higher education providers for the information they publish about their admissions policies
- ensure all higher education providers are subject to the same reporting requirements
- give students, parents, teachers and career advisors the knowledge and capacity to more easily navigate higher education admissions policies and processes.

The recommendations included changes to the way the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) and other academic requirements are presented and clearer, easier to understand information about the wide range of different application and assessment pathways into higher education for school leavers, mature age students and others interested in pursuing higher education.

A sector-led working group was established, with support from the Department of Education and Training, to develop a practical response to the HESP's report – a joint higher education sector and Australian Government plan to implement the HESP's recommendations. The working group consulted with relevant stakeholders to ensure their engagement with and commitment to the terms of the implementation plan.

The Implementation Working Group (IWG) comprised:

Professor Kerri-Lee Krause, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, Victoria University (Chair)
Professor Marnie Hughes-Warrington, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Australian National University
Professor Allan Evans, Provost and Chief Academic Officer, University of South Australia
Emeritus Professor Sue Willis, Former Vice-Provost (Education Programs), Monash University
Ms Helen Zimmerman, Head of Corporate Affairs, Navitas
Ms Sarah Lye, Student Senator, Australian Catholic University
Ms Belinda Robinson, Chief Executive, Universities Australia
Mr Conor King, Executive Director, Innovative Research Universities
Dr David Christie, Managing Director, Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) and Chair, Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres
Mr Anthony McClaran, Chief Executive Officer, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

This implementation plan captures the agreed actions to which higher education sector stakeholders and relevant government agencies commit in order to deliver the HESP's recommendations.

Purpose and principles

As proposed by the HESP, the key aim of its recommendations is to standardise the manner in which higher education providers present information about their admission requirements and processes. The HESP identified what it considered the minimum range of information necessary to support informed choice by prospective students. The HESP proposed that wherever such information is published – on provider websites, by tertiary admission centres, etc., a comparable range of information should be made available so that it was easy to find and contained the key information necessary to help prospective students to choose between courses and providers. The HESP also proposed that in at least one location – which it described as a "national admissions information platform" – the range of information should be able to be lined up across different courses and providers to enable direct comparison of admission requirements and application processes.

The working group established to develop this implementation plan and the sector organisations endorsing the plan agree that the purpose of this standardisation is to:

- make information on admissions policies available in a comparable format so that individuals can make better informed choices about providers and courses of study.
- clarify the requirements of the revised Higher Education Standards Framework with respect to transparency of admissions policies, and ensure that higher education providers know what they must do to meet fully those requirements.
- reduce uncertainty among students and their teachers about what is required in order to be admitted to higher education, especially where admission is on the basis of the ATAR achieved.
- give each higher education provider the capacity to promote a strong sense of its educational ethos and how admissions policies seek to contribute to that mission.
- ensure higher education providers can be held accountable for the information they publish on their admissions policies.

It is also agreed that the following principles, proposed by the HESP, will guide the development and implementation of greater transparency in higher education admissions policies, processes and information.

- A student-centred approach to the provision of information about admissions.
- Higher education providers have autonomy over their admissions policies, consistent with the requirements set out in the Higher Education Standards Framework.
- Access to clear information relating to admissions requirements and various entry pathways is to be made available to all applicants equally.
- The arrangements set out in this implementation plan apply equally to all higher education providers, universities and non-university higher education providers alike.
- Higher education providers are accountable for public claims against their stated admission policies.
- Improved transparency of higher education admissions policies and compliance with the terms of this implementation plan are not intended to add regulatory red-tape over and above what is necessary to comply with the Higher Education Standards Framework.

The initial focus of this work will be to support prospective domestic undergraduate student choice.

Implementation objectives

The actions committed to in this implementation plan will deliver easier access to comprehensive and readily comparable information about the full range of study options, entry requirements and application processes at all registered Australian higher education providers.

Through implementing the actions set out in this plan, six agreed objectives will be delivered over the course of 2017 and 2018:

1 Standardised presentation of admissions information
2 Adoption of common admissions terminology
3 Revised ATAR-related thresholds and definitions, as applicable
4 Tertiary admission centres to adopt more consistent approaches and reporting and streamline interstate application processes
5 TEQSA monitoring and guidance on improved admissions transparency
6 New national admissions information platform

The first four of these will be delivered largely by the higher education sector itself. Delivery of the last two will be the responsibility of the Australian Government. As far as possible, elements of each of these commitments will be in place to assist students seeking to enter higher education in the 2018 academic year. Full implementation of all commitments will take longer but should be in place, at the latest, to assist students seeking to enter higher education in 2019.

The scope and detail of each of the six objectives is outlined below, along with target timeframes for delivering specific elements and making them publicly available. A summary of the specific actions required to implement each of the objectives is outlined in the following section.

Higher Education Sector-led Initiatives

1. Standardised presentation of admissions information

All higher education providers – universities and non-universities alike – will adopt a common approach to the provision of information about:

- course and institutional entry requirements, including institution-wide policies and any course-specific academic or non-academic requirements or prerequisites.
- available application or entry options for all domestic students – both school leavers and non-school leavers – including any special or at-school offer schemes for particular target groups; plus information on the proportion of students entering by each basis of admission.
- the methods and policies used to assess applications including how any academic rank, auditions, portfolio assessments or other specified tests are used.
- where ATAR is an element of the application assessment, the minimum ATAR required, if relevant, and how any available ATAR-related adjustment schemes (e.g. bonus points or reduced thresholds) operate.
- academic and non-academic supports available within or by referral from the institution, including access to career advice.
- the cost of study.
- financial support available including scholarships, student loans and fee discount schemes

- campus facilities, student life, social and sporting facilities, transport and accommodation options and student employment opportunities.

The primary mechanism to achieve this is the adoption by institutions of common information sets for the provision of course and institutional admissions information. Information sets will be agreed that communicate the range and specified detail for the types of information that all higher education providers are expected to make available through publications and online presence – either through their own website or that of the relevant tertiary admission centre/s. Where a specified type or detail of information is not relevant or not available, this will be indicated for clarity.

Draft proposals for information sets to convey information about whole-of-institution admission policies (Appendix C) and course-specific admission requirements (Appendix D) are presented in this implementation plan. The IWG will refine and agree final information sets that the entire higher education sector can commit to adopting.

It is expected that the agreed information sets will be adopted in 2017 to guide all online presentation of provider and TAC admissions information. Nevertheless, it is recognised that it may take some time to reach the level of sophistication to which institutions aspire. In the first year of implementation, a 'best endeavours' approach will be sufficient to ensure that the information is available in the agreed formats, even if this is as a separate document or series of documents, in addition to existing approaches on institution websites.

When:
By June 2017: detail of 'information sets' that set out the types of information and minimum information requirements that providers and, where appropriate, tertiary admission centres will convey about institution-wide and course-specific admission options and entry requirements will be agreed and endorsed by the sector.

By August 2017: all higher education providers will publish on their websites, or otherwise make readily available:

- information about their institutional admissions policies, consistent with the whole-of-institution information set outlined at Appendix C.
- information about the admission requirements of each course or appropriate cluster of related courses offered by the institution, consistent with the course information set outlined at Appendix D.

Language used in the information sets will be consistent with the agreed common terminology and ATAR-related thresholds and definitions.

As an initial step in 2017, a 'best endeavours' approach will be acceptable. If it is not possible to adopt the information sets as frameworks for information presentation throughout the institution's website, at the very least a 'pdf' or similar document should be made available in a prominent location on the provider website that presents the requisite information.

Trialling use of the information sets in this way in 2017 will help to identify any operational issues and to enable their use to be refined in subsequent years.

By May 2018: all tertiary admission centres as well as higher education providers will adopt the agreed information sets for provision of all online information about institution-wide and course-specific admission options and entry requirements applicable to prospective students for the 2019 academic year and beyond and make this information available for inclusion on a national admissions information platform.

By July 2019: the Department of Education and Training will implement any necessary changes to data collection through the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS) or other related information technology systems, to support fully the collection and reporting of data required to verify and report information included in the information sets.

2. Adoption of common admissions terminology

To enhance the ability of prospective students to compare course offerings across institutions, the sector will adopt consistent usage of similar terms and phrases to describe common admission-related concepts and actions. This will help to reduce confusion and remove questions of difference arising where none exists.

This is particularly relevant to issues relating to special entry requirements and equity-related application options where students seeking access through these schemes, or eligible to do so, may have difficulty discerning whether different language implies different requirements or not.

Indicative examples of the types of terminology in question and approach to determining common language and definitions are provided at Appendix B. Examples include terminology relating to the main application options or basis of admission and various types of ATAR-related adjustment factors that may be available depending on students' circumstances. The IWG will refine and agree the list of common terms and definitions that the entire higher education sector can commit to adopting, including ATAR-related threshold naming conventions.

When:

By June 2017: initial set of common terms , admission-related concepts and definitions necessary to support implementation of the sector-wide common information sets will be determined and common language agreed.

By August 2017: information published in accordance with the whole-of-institution and course information sets at Appendices C and D will utilise language consistent with the initial set of agreed common terms.

Ongoing during 2017: providers are encouraged to progressively adopt the agreed common terms, admission-related concepts and definitions in all publications.

February 2018: a final proposal for a comprehensive set of common admissions terminology will be developed and agreed by the IWG for sector consultation, agreement and then endorsement by May 2018.

By May 2018: all registered higher education providers, tertiary admission centres and the other organisations endorsing this implementation plan will adopt usage of the agreed set of common terms, concepts and definitions in their admission-related publications and online information.

3. Revised ATAR-related thresholds and definitions, as applicable

To ensure the clarity, usefulness and public credibility of published ATAR course entry thresholds and reporting on admissions in a previous year, the definitions of these figures will be amended to include the impact of all rounds of offers for places in higher education courses.

Where ATAR-related thresholds or the outcomes of past admissions are published, it will be made clear whether the figures include the impact of any ATAR-related adjustment schemes that students may be eligible to access (e.g. 'bonus points' or reduced thresholds) or whether they are exclusive of the effects of any ATAR adjustments that may have been applied.

For *prospective* thresholds indicating who may be admitted to a course in future on the basis of ATAR, institutions should indicate whether these relate solely to the student's 'raw' or unadjusted ATAR, or can be achieved through a combination of the 'raw' ATAR plus any personal circumstance-related adjustment factors for which they may be eligible (e.g. equity or subject-related 'bonuses').

However, when reporting the outcomes of *past* admissions where ATAR was a factor in the selection process, indications of the lowest, highest, or percentile ATAR ranges must be calculated *exclusive* of any adjustment factors that may have applied.

When:

By June 2017: revised definitions and naming conventions for ATAR-related thresholds and reporting figures will be agreed.

By August 2017: all providers and tertiary admission centres will adopt the revised definitions and naming conventions for the publication of ATAR-related thresholds and reporting of past year admissions to inform and support applications relating to the 2018 academic year and beyond.

4. Tertiary admission centres to adopt more consistent approaches and reporting and streamline interstate application processes

Like other sector stakeholders, by May 2018, tertiary admission centres will adopt the common terminology and language developed, together with agreed information sets as the basis for presenting information to prospective students seeking to enter higher education in the 2019 academic year and beyond.

In addition to this, tertiary admission centres will develop improved reporting products on the outcomes of higher education offers, acceptances and enrolments, such that there will be greater consistency in the availability, detail and format of published data and other information. This will enable an enhanced level of comparability and consistency in the information reported in each jurisdiction about the operation of the higher education market.

Reporting products will be revised and improved progressively, with priority given to developing an agreed core suite of standard reported data on admissions to study in the 2018 academic year and a more comprehensive core suite of standard reported data on admissions to study in the 2019 academic year.

Tertiary admission centres will also develop and implement a more streamlined approach to accepting and managing applications for courses at institutions that have membership of another

tertiary admission centre in a different jurisdiction. This streamlined approach is expected to reduce complexity and costs for prospective students.

Students will be able to make application through their local tertiary admission centre to enter any Australian higher education course at any provider that uses the services of a tertiary admission centre to manage applications for and offers of places.

This may be a separate process to the normal preference-based selection system within the jurisdiction but should remove the current need for students to lodge multiple applications through different tertiary admission centres and to pay multiple separate fees for each application to be assessed. Instead, a mechanism will be developed to direct applications for selected interstate course options at higher education providers that are members of another tertiary admission centre to the relevant jurisdictions for consideration, with reduced complexity and cost to the applicant.

NB: this excludes situations where a tertiary admission centre may be managing direct applications to an institution on the institution's behalf. For the purposes of this initiative, "tertiary admission centre" includes the University of Tasmania, which accepts and manages applications in Tasmania.

When:

By August 2017: tertiary admission centres will develop and commence implementation of a more streamlined approach to the acceptance and assessment of applications for courses at providers that are a member of a tertiary admission centre in another jurisdiction.

By December 2017: tertiary admission centres will agree a core suite of standard reports to be produced with consistent content and presentation on admissions to higher education in the 2018 academic year.

Throughout 2018: tertiary admission centres will produce the agreed core suite of standard reports with consistent content and presentation on admissions to higher education in the 2018 academic year.

By May 2018: all tertiary admission centres will adopt the agreed information sets for provision of information about institution-wide and course-specific admission options and entry requirements applicable to prospective students for the 2019 academic year and beyond.

By May 2018: all tertiary admission centres will adopt usage of the agreed set of common terms, concepts and definitions in their admission-related publications and online information.

By December 2018: tertiary admission centres will agree a more comprehensive core suite of standard reports to be produced with consistent content and presentation on admissions to higher education in the 2019 academic year.

Throughout 2019: tertiary admission centres will produce the agreed minimum suite of reports with consistent content and presentation on admissions to higher education in the 2019 academic year.

Australian Government-led Initiatives

5. TEQSA monitoring and guidance on improved admissions transparency

Once the details of common terminology and language and the adoption of information sets have been agreed by the sector through the arrangements set out in this plan, TEQSA will develop written guidance on the types of evidence it would expect to see to demonstrate compliance with those commitments in order to satisfy the admissions transparency elements of the Higher Education Standards Framework.

TEQSA's guidance will need to take account of this implementation plan and the detailed stakeholder engagement undertaken by the IWG and its technical sub-working groups to respond to the HESP's recommendations.

The aim of the guidance will be to assist higher education providers of all types, scales and sophistication to engage proactively with the new sector-wide commitments and develop their own tailored responses to the need for greater transparency of admissions-related information for prospective students and the community at large. The guidance will recognise that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution; that every provider has the scope to differentiate itself in the market and tailor the presentation of information to its needs and mission. This guidance, once in place, will form the basis for TEQSA's monitoring of the response by the sector to the HESP's recommendations and its progress reporting to government and the public.

The Government will determine what role TEQSA will play to monitor engagement by higher education providers with the HESP's recommendations, and how it will report on the sector's response. However, this will include the beginnings of a formative evaluation of sector compliance with the enhanced admissions transparency commitments in this plan, including a desktop audit of initial responses to the implementation plan, assessment of how this relates to the admissions transparency requirements of the Higher Education Standards Framework and ongoing monitoring of how the response to the HESP's recommendations takes effect over time.

The Government expects the spirit and intent of the HESP's recommendations to be embodied in this implementation plan and will ensure TEQSA is provided with necessary powers for effective compliance. The initial audit of provider responses will enable TEQSA to assess any change over time in the sector's performance and compliance with the commitments embodied in this implementation plan.

An overarching consideration will be to minimise the impost on providers of TEQSA's monitoring and accountability reporting. As far as possible, TEQSA will base its assessments and monitoring on publicly available information to minimise any additional regulatory burden associated with this activity. The legislative and regulatory transparency requirements of the Higher Education Standards Framework have not changed. What has changed, as a result of the HESP's recommendations and this implementation plan, is the recognition that in order to address those standards more comprehensively, a higher level of transparency and consistency in the sector's approach to these issues is needed.

When:

August to December 2017: TEQSA will undertake initial work on a formative evaluation of sector responses to the HESP's recommendations, in light of the commitments embodied in this implementation plan – including responses to the adoption of common terminology and information sets. The evaluation will provide a progress snapshot of the sector in its move towards greater transparency of higher education admissions.

By December 2017: informed by the findings and evidence provided during the formative evaluation, TEQSA will release a draft guidance note on improving the transparency of higher education admissions for stakeholder comment. The guidance note will include discussion of the types of evidence TEQSA would expect to see to demonstrate compliance with those commitments, in order to satisfy the admissions transparency elements of the Higher Education Standards Framework. TEQSA will also provide guidance on how providers of different types and in different circumstances can seek to improve the availability, comparability and effectiveness of their provision of such information.

By February 2018: TEQSA will commence monitoring and reporting to government and the community on how higher education providers are responding to the HESP's recommendations and commitments embodied in this implementation plan in order to transition to an enhanced level of transparency in higher education admissions.

6. New national admissions information platform

Development of a national admissions information platform is out of scope for the sector-led working group, but the actions arising from objectives 1-4 above will inform the development of the new platform.

The Department of Education and Training will undertake a research discovery project to inform the development of the platform in line with the Digital Transformation Agency's Digital Service Standard. The department will also work with stakeholders and relevant partners in the higher education sector, including the tertiary admission centres, and State and Territory governments to develop a new online information source that will provide a useful first point of contact for prospective students seeking information on higher education courses and providers.

The findings of the discovery research project, which will include service design options, will be shared with the IWG.

The national admissions information platform will respond to the needs of students seeking information about institutions, courses, admission requirements and application pathways. It will be based on user research which examines how students use current services and identify what they think needs improvement.

A user-centric approach to design of the information to be presented will ensure the scope of this work makes it easier for prospective students and their families to access or be directed to the information they need to help make decisions about courses and providers before considering making an application. It is envisaged that initially the primary audience for the platform will be current and prospective domestic undergraduate students, with possible future expansion to include information relevant to admissions for international students.

A key feature of the national admissions information platform will be the capacity to directly compare the admission policies, courses and admission requirements across different higher education providers. The lack of ready comparability in currently available information was a key concern that the HESP sought to address through its recommendations. Delivering this comparability will be critical to the success of the national admissions information platform in empowering informed choice by prospective students.

It is envisaged that, as with the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) website, the new national admissions website will include the capability to select a number of different courses or providers (depending on the type of information being compared) and display direct comparison of key information types – e.g. ATAR and other entry requirements, available admission options, student cohort information including data on the basis of admission for recent enrolments.

Adequate support to school students, their parents, schools, teachers and career advisers to use the new national admissions information platform will be critical to its success. As the national admissions information platform is developed, the Department of Education and Training, in consultation with stakeholders, will develop and promote appropriate online supporting materials to help prospective students, their families, schools, teachers and career educators to make the most of the new resources and functionality developed.

When:

By June 2017: the Department of Education and Training will begin consultations with prospective partner agencies and other stakeholders on options to develop, deliver and sustain a new higher education national admissions information platform.

By July 2017: the Department of Education and Training, working in conjunction with the Digital Transformation Agency, will complete an initial scoping study to assess core user needs and design and test options for a new higher education national admissions information platform.

By October 2017: the Department of Education and Training will enter into a development agreement with selected partner organisations to develop, deliver and maintain a new higher education national admissions information platform.

By December 2017: the national admissions information platform will begin a phased approach to delivery with an initial pilot release intended for December 2017.

Benefits and accountability

Through this implementation plan and its endorsement by the key representative organisations relevant to higher education admissions, the higher education sector is collectively committing to implement positive change.

The main beneficiaries of this change are intended to be prospective higher education students, their families, their schools and other influencers.

Further, higher education providers, employers, the community at large and both Commonwealth and state and territory governments should all derive benefits if the transparency and effectiveness of higher education admissions policies and processes can be enhanced.

Prospective students should be able to identify more readily and apply in a more informed way for the courses that will lead them to the career opportunities they seek.

They will be able to identify the full range of entry requirements, pre-requisites, additional assessments and tests needed to be accepted into each course. It will be easier for them to find out about the range of academic and non-academic supports available to them at each institution, together with the financial and other relevant information needed to make their choices.

Students' families, schools, career advisers and other influencers should be able to more readily find useful information about the full range of study, career and application options, including specific options for students facing disadvantage or with special needs.

It is recognised that more consistent and transparent admissions information is not a "quick fix" for improving student retention and completion rates in higher education. Many students will continue to need support and advice in making course and study choices. Nevertheless, if students can make better informed decisions about the most appropriate course and institution for their needs, capabilities and career aspirations, they will be more likely to navigate their way successfully through the higher education system. This, in turn, is expected to complement existing institutional strategies for reducing the rate of student attrition.

Institutions will benefit if students are making better, more informed decisions about which course to enter, and should be able to more readily tailor their academic and support offerings to students' needs and circumstances.

Government – and through it the community and economy – will benefit through a more efficient targeting of precious taxpayer resources if it can be assured that students being accepted by institutions into subsidised higher education courses have the ambitions, the attributes and the necessary information and support to succeed at their studies and complete their qualification.

To ensure the achievement of all these benefits, the Government will consider whether it is necessary to require specific actions in response to the commitments embodied in this implementation plan, along with possible mechanisms for ensuring delivery of those actions.

At a minimum, TEQSA will be asked to report periodically on the sector's progress in responding to the HESP's recommendations and complying with the commitments in this implementation plan.

Other responses may be considered as needed, depending on the extent of take-up of the committed actions.

The Government is committed to working closely with the sector and to investing in the achievement of these goals, both through the development of this joint higher education sector and Australian Government implementation plan and development of a national admissions information platform.

Actions and timeframe required to implement the plan

Implementation objective	Actions required	Actors	Timeframe
1. Standardised presentation of admissions information HESP recommendations 3, 4,5,8,9 Agree the detail of national templates or information sets for consistent and comparable presentation by higher education providers, TACs and government of higher education provider and course admission pathways, options, requirements and reporting, including any new data collection required to support this. The information sets include provision for the publication of information on all ATAR and non-ATAR application and assessment options.	A sub-working group of the IWG to examine and refine the two templates proposed by the HESP for: (1) Information that applies at the **whole-of-institution** level (i.e. that applies to all students and courses) on admission policies, descriptions of application processes, assessment methods and general entry requirements, campuses, academic and non-academic supports and services, student life, etc. All available application pathways need to be canvassed, including ATAR-based and non-ATAR admission options. (2) Information on **course-specific** admission requirements, including ATAR and non-ATAR requirements, subject pre-requisites, course-specific applicant assessments, subject-related adjustment factors or other specific admission policies, course-specific campus and teaching facilities, subject-specific career paths. Includes reportable data on recent student cohorts, including basis of admission. The intent is that this template could be tailored for use in different contexts – e.g. up-to-date faculty-level information and current year data on a provider website, course-specific information, consistently presented with past year data on a TAC website, aggregated at field of study level (or possibly course-level) on a national admissions information portal. The sub-working group to: i. consult with stakeholders; and ii. take account of data sources, usage contexts and the work of other sub-working groups (especially regarding common terminology and ATAR thresholds). IWG to endorse the proposed templates or information sets refined by the sub-working group for sector-wide consultation. Stakeholder consultation and endorsement of proposed information sets. IWG to endorse final information sets. Providers and TACs to adopt the agreed information sets for presentation of information on their websites, using agreed common terms and revised ATAR-related thresholds and definitions. An accountability framework to be developed and agreed with the Government, including consequences for non-adoption of the information sets. TEQSA will develop monitoring and reporting on adoption of the information sets as part of its functions. The National Admissions Information Platform will also adopt or draw on the information sets as the basis for information to be made available in comparable format on a national basis.	IWG Providers TACs TEQSA Department	Sub-working group commissioned by end March 2017. Sub-working group and IWG to consult with stakeholders and agree information sets and approach for inclusion in implementation plan by June 2017. Institutions have 'best endeavours' version of whole-of-institution and course information sets available to prospective students by August 2017. Accountability framework developed by end November 2017. Input required to prepare publications for 2019 academic year gathered by April 2018 – or earlier, depending on TAC deadlines. All provider and TAC online admissions information presented consistent with agreed information sets by May 2018.

Implementation objective	Actions required	Actors	Timeframe
2. Common admission-related terminology identification and definitions HESP recommendations 3, 6 Identify and agree the naming and definitions for a range of common admission-related concepts, transactions and terms that are used around higher education admissions policies and processes. • An example is the terms 'clearly in ATAR' in Victoria and 'ATAR cut-off' in other states for a term with the same data definition. • Another is the naming of different types of ATAR-related adjustment factors– e.g.: o subject/ academic/ Language, Literacy and mathematics, 'bonus points' o rural/regional points o educational access scheme/equity points The aim is to reduce the use of duplicate terms for similar concepts – at least for use in the information sets when adopted but ideally everywhere.	A sub-working group of the IWG to identify a range of common admission-related concepts, definitions and terms used around higher education admissions policies and processes. The sub-working group to: i. consult with stakeholders; and ii. agree on consistent naming and definition of an initial set of common terms and concepts for inclusion in whole-of-institution and course admission information sets; and iii. propose a phased approach to implementation that allows for progressively adding to the glossary between June 2017 and May 2018. IWG to endorse the agreed initial common terms and definitions and a phased approach to implementation for sector-wide consultation. Stakeholder consultation and endorsement of initial common terms and definitions and approach to implementation. IWG to agree initial common terms and definitions and phased approach to implementation, based on stakeholder feedback. Relevant higher education providers, organisations and TACs to adopt the agreed initial common terms and definitions in their admission-related information and publications and eliminate usage of alternative terms. Continuing sector engagement on and refinement of common terms and definitions during 2017. Final proposal for more comprehensive set of common admissions terminology developed and agreed by the IWG for sector consultation, agreement and endorsement. All registered providers, TACs and other relevant organisations using the agreed common terminology in official publications and online by May 2018.	IWG Providers TACs Related sector orgs	Sub-working group commissioned by end March 2017. Sub-working group and IWG to consult with stakeholders and agree initial common terms and definitions included in implementation plan by June 2017. Providers' use of information sets by August 2017 incorprate agreed initial common terms. Providers, TACS and others progressively adopt agreed common terms and definitions in all publications during 2017. Comprehensive set of terms and definitions developed by February 2018, for sector agreement by May 2018. Providers, TACs and others begin adoption of common terminology from August 2017. Full implementation of agreed common terminology in official publications and online by May 2018

Implementation objective	Actions required	Actors	Timeframe
3. Revised ATAR-related thresholds and definitions HESP recommendation 5 The naming, mathematical calculations and data definitions for ATAR-related thresholds and reporting to be amended to reflect the impact of all rounds of offers for places in higher education, including: a. the lowest ATAR admitted to a course in the previous year b. where relevant, the minimum ATAR for consideration of admission in the coming year c. provider, TAC and government ATAR-related reporting on offers, acceptances and previous year enrolments.	Informed by stakeholder consultation, a sub-working group of the IWG and subsequently the IWG itself to review and agree the naming, mathematical calculations and data definitions for ATAR-related thresholds and reporting to reflect the impact of all rounds of offers for places in higher education, including: a. the lowest ATAR admitted to a course in the previous year b. where relevant, the lowest ATAR guaranteed to be accepted in the coming year c. provider, TAC and government ATAR-related reporting on offers, acceptances and previous year enrolments. IWG to endorse the revised ATAR-related definitions and naming conventions for stakeholder consultation. Stakeholder consultation and endorsement of revised ATAR-related definitions and naming conventions. IWG to endorse revised ATAR-related definitions and naming conventions. Relevant higher education providers, organisations and TACs to adopt the agreed ATAR-related definitions and naming conventions.	IWG Providers TACs Related sector orgs	Sub-working group commissioned by end March 2017. Sub-working group and IWG to consult with stakeholders and agree on revised ATAR-related definitions and naming conventions by June 2017. Revised ATAR-related definitions and naming conventions in use by all sector stakeholders by August 2017.
4. Tertiary admission centres to adopt more consistent approaches and reporting and streamline interstate application processes HESP recommendation 6 TACs to develop more consistent approaches to publishing information to support student engagement with application processes, provider and course selection and report on the outcomes of offers and acceptances into higher education places. This will entail sharing and adopting good practice across jurisdictions to deliver consistent and comparable processes and reports. TACs to introduce a more streamlined approach for prospective students to apply to enter courses at institutions located in other states and territories.	When the IWG has endorsed the agreed common admission-related concepts, terms and definitions, the TACs will progressively adopt this common terminology in their publications and information products. Once the revised ATAR-related definitions and naming conventions have been agreed, the TACs will adopt these for use in all products and processes applicable to students seeking to enter higher education in the 2019 academic year and beyond. TACs to agree and implement a common approach to reporting application, offer and enrolment data in a consistent way, aiming for the highest quality common approach, with a core suite of standard reports to be produced with consistent content and presentation on admissions to higher education in the 2018 academic year and a more comprehensive core suite of standard reports for the 2019 academic year and beyond. TACs to develop and implement streamlined arrangements for applications by students to interstate institutions, with reduced complexity and cost to students. A sub-working group of the IWG and subsequently the IWG itself will consider this proposal and endorse an agreed approach or recommend an alternative. As requested in the Australian Government response to the HESP's recommendations, taking account of all these developments, the sub-working group and then the IWG will consider whether	TACs IWG	TACs develop and commence implementation of a more streamlined interstate application process by August 2017. TACs agree core suite of standard reports by December 2017 for use in 2018 academic year. TACs adopt agreed information sets, common admission-related terms and revised ATAR-related definitions and naming conventions (by May 2018) for 2019 academic year and beyond.

Implementation objective	Actions required	Actors	Timeframe
	the implementation of the HESP's recommendations would be better achieved through the current arrangement of separate TACs in different jurisdictions, or through a more consolidated national approach.		IWG provide advice to government on future TAC arrangements by May 2018. TACs agree more comprehensive suite of standard reports by December 2018 to use on 2019 application data.
5. TEQSA monitoring and guidance on improved admissions transparency (out of scope for IWG, but will be informed by outcomes of IWG) HESP recommendations 11, 12 The Government will determine what role TEQSA will play to monitor and report on the higher education sector's engagement with the HESP's recommendations and the commitments to enhanced transparency embodied in this implementation plan. This will include some form of audit of sector compliance with the admissions transparency requirements of the Higher Education Standards Framework, taking account of these enhanced commitments, and then monitoring how the response to the HESP's recommendations takes effect over time. To support implementation of these enhanced commitments, TEQSA will develop written guidance on the types of evidence it expects to see to demonstrate compliance with the admissions transparency elements of the Higher Education Standards Framework. Once in place, this guidance will form the basis for TEQSA's monitoring and progress reporting on admissions transparency.	TEQSA to conduct a formative evaluation of sector compliance with the enhanced admissions transparency commitments in this plan– including responses to the adoption of common terminology and information sets. This will include an audit of initial responses to the implementation plan, assessment of how this relates to the admissions transparency requirements of the Higher Education Standards Framework and ongoing monitoring of how the response to the HESP's recommendations takes effect over time. As far as possible, the audit and ongoing monitoring will draw on publicly available information and entail minimal additional regulatory burden for providers and other stakeholders. TEQSA to develop a guidance note on improving the transparency of higher education admissions, including discussion of the types of evidence it would expect to see to demonstrate compliance with those commitments, in order to satisfy the admissions transparency elements of the Higher Education Standards Framework and guidance on how providers of different types and in different circumstances can seek to improve the availability, comparability and effectiveness of their provision of such information. This will draw on findings from initial work on the formative evaluation. TEQSA to monitor and report to government and the community on how higher education providers are responding to the HESP's recommendations and commitments in this implementation plan.	TEQSA IWG	Initial work on formative evaluation completed by December 2017. Draft guidance note released by December 2017. Progress reporting to commence by February 2018.

Implementation objective	Actions required	Actors	Timeframe
6 New national admissions information platform (out of scope for IWG, but will be informed by outcomes of IWG) HESP recommendations 7, 10, 13	Informed by the outcomes of the IWG, the Department of Education and Training to undertake initial scoping and user research to inform design and ambition for the platform, in conjunction with the Digital Transformation Agency. Department of Education and Training to engage key stakeholders including IWG, TACs, Universities Australia, ACPET, COPHE, TDA, Good Education Group and Open Universities Australia on options to develop and deliver the platform. Department of Education and Training to enter into a development agreement with selected partner organisations to develop, deliver and maintain a new higher education national admissions information platform, including oversight of: • any required procurement to build/manage the platform. • design and development with stakeholders of any required information collection processes, including additional data collection capability within HEIMS or other data platforms. • development and promotion of online resources to support and empower potential users of the national admissions information platform – including school students, their parents, schools, teachers, career advisers and potential mature age students – to be developed, published and effectively promoted. Any additional data and information collection required in HEIMS to be developed as part of HEIMS redevelopment.	Department IWG Providers TACs Related sector orgs	Engagement with stakeholders and potential partners commenced by June 2017. Scoping and initial user research complete by July 2017. Development agreement in place; required procurement underway by October 2017. Phase one platform pilot released in December 2018. Online user resources finalised by July 2018. HEIMS additional data items collected from January 2019.

Implementation timeline

The table below sets out the agreed objectives set out in this implementation plan in their order of proposed delivery.

By when	Category	Objective
Jun-17	Terminology	Initial set of common terms, admission-related concepts and definitions necessary to support implementation of the sector-wide common information sets will be determined and common language agreed.
	Standardised information presentation	Detail of 'information sets' that set out the types of information and minimum information requirements that providers and, where appropriate, tertiary admission centres will convey about institution-wide and course-specific admission options and entry requirements will be agreed and endorsed by the sector.
	ATAR-related	Revised definitions and naming conventions for ATAR-related thresholds and reporting figures will be agreed.
	Information platform	The Department of Education and Training will begin consultations with prospective partner agencies and other stakeholders on options to develop, deliver and sustain a new higher education national admissions information platform.
Jul-17	Information platform	The Department of Education and Training, working in conjunction with the Digital Transformation Agency, will complete an initial scoping study to assess core user needs and design options for a new higher education national admissions information platform.
Aug-17	Standardised information presentation	All higher education providers will publish on their websites, or otherwise make readily available: • information about their institutional admissions policies, consistent with the whole-of-institution information set outlined at Appendix C. • information about the admission requirements of each course or appropriate cluster of related courses offered by the institution, consistent with the course information set outlined at Appendix D. Language used in the information sets will be consistent with the agreed common terminology and ATAR-related thresholds and definitions. As an initial step in 2017, a 'best endeavours' approach will be acceptable. If it is not possible to adopt the information sets as frameworks for information presentation throughout the institution's website, at the very least a 'pdf' or similar document should be made available in a prominent location on the provider website that presents the requisite information. Trialling use of the information sets in this way in 2017 will help to identify any operational issues and to enable their use to be refined in subsequent years.
	Terminology	Information published in accordance with the whole-of-institution and course information sets at Appendices C and D will utilise language consistent with the initial set of agreed common terms.

By when	Category	Objective
Aug-17	ATAR-related	All providers and tertiary admission centres will adopt the revised definitions and naming conventions for the publication of ATAR-related thresholds and reporting of past year admissions to inform and support applications relating to the 2018 academic year and beyond.
	TACs and interstate applications	Tertiary admission centres will develop and commence implementation of a more streamlined approach to the acceptance and assessment of applications for courses at providers that are a member of a tertiary admission centre in another jurisdiction.
Aug-17 to Dec-17	Terminology	Providers are encouraged to progressively adopt the agreed common terms and language in all publications throughout 2017.
	TEQSA guidance	TEQSA will undertake initial work on a formative evaluation of sector responses to the HESP's recommendations, in light of the commitments embodied in this implementation plan – including responses to the adoption of common terminology and information sets. The evaluation will provide a progress snapshot of the sector in its move towards greater transparency of higher education admissions.
Oct-17	Information platform	The Department of Education and Training will enter into a development agreement with selected partner organisations to develop, deliver and maintain a new higher education admissions information platform.
Dec-17	TACs and interstate applications	Tertiary admission centres will agree a core suite of standard reports to be produced with consistent content and presentation on admissions to higher education in the 2018 academic year.
	TEQSA guidance	Informed by the findings and evidence provided during the formative evaluation, TEQSA will release a draft guidance note on improving the transparency of higher education admissions for stakeholder comment. The guidance note will include discussion of the types of evidence TEQSA would expect to see to demonstrate compliance with those commitments, in order to satisfy the admissions transparency elements of the Higher Education Standards Framework. TEQSA will also provide guidance on how providers of different types and in different circumstances can seek to improve the availability, comparability and effectiveness of their provision of such information.
	Information platform	The national admissions information platform will begin a phased approach to delivery with an initial pilot release intended for December 2017.
2018	TACs and interstate applications	Tertiary admission centres will produce the agreed core suite of standard reports with consistent content and presentation on admissions to higher education in the 2018 academic year.
Feb-18	Terminology	A final proposal for a comprehensive set of common admissions terminology will be developed and agreed by the IWG for sector consultation, agreement and then endorsement by May 2018.
	TEQSA guidance	TEQSA will commence monitoring and reporting to government and the community on how higher education providers are responding to the HESP's recommendations and commitments embodied in this implementation plan in order to transition to an enhanced level of transparency in higher education admissions.

By when	Category	Objective
May-18	Standardised information presentation	All tertiary admission centres as well as higher education providers will adopt the agreed information sets for provision of all online information about institution-wide and course-specific admission options and entry requirements applicable to prospective students for the 2019 academic year and beyond and make this information available for inclusion on a national admissions information platform.
	Terminology	All registered higher education providers, tertiary admission centres and the other organisations endorsing this implementation plan will adopt usage of the agreed set of common terms, concepts and definitions in their admission-related publications and online information.
	TACs and interstate applications	All tertiary admission centres will adopt the agreed information sets for provision of information about institution-wide and course-specific admission options and entry requirements applicable to prospective students for the 2019 academic year and beyond.
Dec-18	TACs and interstate applications	Tertiary admission centres will agree a more comprehensive core suite of standard reports to be produced with consistent content and presentation on admissions to higher education in the 2019 academic year.
2019	TACs and interstate applications	Tertiary admission centres will produce the agreed core suite of standard reports with consistent content and presentation on admissions to higher education in the 2019 academic year.
Jul-19	Standardised information presentation	The Department of Education and Training will implement any necessary changes to data collection through the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS) or other related information technology systems, to support fully the collection and reporting of data required to verify and report information included in the information sets.

Appendix A: Admissions Transparency Implementation Working Group Terms of Reference

The Admissions Transparency Implementation Working Group (IWG) will:

In scope:

Implementation plan

1 By end May 2017, develop a plan to implement the recommendations from the Higher Education Standards Panel' s *Improving the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions* report, which captures the agreed actions to which higher education sector stakeholders and relevant government agencies commit.

2 Consult with relevant stakeholders to ensure their engagement with and commitment to the terms of the implementation plan.

Information presentation and reporting

3 Develop and endorse a statement of sector intent to adopt principles proposed by the HESP to facilitate transparency of higher education admission policies, processes and practices. (Recommendations 1, 2)

4 Agree the detail of national templates for consistent and comparable presentation by higher education providers, tertiary admission centres and government of higher education provider and course admission pathways, options, requirements and reporting, including any new data collection required to support this. The templates include provision for the publication of information on all ATAR and non-ATAR application and assessment options. (Recommendations 4, 5, 8, 9)

5 Agree the terms of sector-wide engagement with the development by government and other relevant stakeholders of a new national admissions information platform. (Recommendations 7, 10)

Consistent language

6 Agree the admission-related issues for which consistent terminology would be beneficial and develop and endorse the common terminology to be adopted. (Recommendations 3, 6)

ATAR-related definitions

7 Review and agree the naming and definitions for ATAR-related thresholds and reporting, such that these reflect the impact of all rounds of offers for places in higher education (Recommendation 5), including:

   a. the lowest ATAR admitted to a course in the previous year
   b. where relevant, the lowest ATAR guaranteed to be accepted in the coming year
   c. provider, tertiary admission centre and government ATAR-related reporting on offers, acceptances and previous year enrolments.

Interstate application processes

8 Recommend or endorse a proposed national approach to the management of cross-border applications by tertiary admission centres. Consider whether the HESP's recommendations can be achieved while retaining the current arrangement of separate tertiary admission centres in

different jurisdictions, or if a more consolidated national approach is advisable. (Recommendation 6)

Accountability

9 Endorse and champion an accountability framework to monitor and report on achievement of the sector-wide commitments agreed in the implementation plan. (Recommendation 11)

10 Engage with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency's (TEQSA) development of formal guidance and monitoring of compliance with those commitments. (Recommendations 11, 12)

Out of scope

The IWG will help facilitate information flow with stakeholders where necessary, but will not be responsible for the following:

- Implementation by the tertiary admission centres of a more streamlined approach to cross-jurisdictional application processes (Recommendation 6 (part))
- Development of a national admissions information platform (Recommendations 7, 10, 13)

The Department of Education and Training will separately establish a process with relevant stakeholders to develop and implement a new national admissions information platform (website). This will be developed in collaboration with tertiary admission centres and other relevant stakeholders as necessary. (Recommendations 7, 10)
An online guide to usage of the national admissions information platform will be developed to support and enable its use by prospective students, their families, advisers, schools and career educators. (Recommendation 13)

Development of TEQSA's approach to monitoring compliance with the sector's commitments to improved transparency in higher education admissions (Recommendations 11, 12)

Once an implementation plan is developed, TEQSA will develop enhanced guidance on the types of evidence it considers will demonstrate compliance with the transparency requirements of the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015.

Further consideration and assessment of the factors and approaches that contribute to student success, completion and attrition rates in higher education (Recommendation 14)

The Higher Education Standards Panel has been tasked with this project in 2017.

Sub-working groups

The IWG will have the capacity to form sub-working groups to give detailed focus to technical or more specialised issues, including the agreement and detail of:

- common admissions terminology and definitions
- redefinition of ATAR-related thresholds and indicators to include the impact of all rounds of offers of places in higher education
- common sector-wide templates for the publication of institution level admissions policies and admission requirements, application pathways and other related information applicable to individual courses/fields of study, depending on the context

- streamlined processes for the acceptance and assessment of applications across state and territory borders

Appendix B: Draft common terminology and data definitions

The terminology and data definitions used in higher education application processes have to support two uses in making the admission arrangements easier to understand:

- supporting individual applicants to find what they need, while understanding that similar individuals may describe themselves in various ways; along with
- robust data reporting, that requires similar individuals to be counted in similar ways.

Initial discussion of the terms used in the higher education application and admissions processes has led to four proposals:

a. framing the information around four application pathways as set out in section 1;
b. reporting of offers to recent Australian Year 12 students by three groups – as set out in section 2, covering assessment:
    i. on the basis of ATAR alone (OP in QLD) or ATAR with the impact of some adjustment factors relevant to the applicant (e.g. 'ATAR bonus points' or reduced ATAR threshold);
    ii. on the basis of a combination of ATAR along with other requirements such as an additional test, interview, audition or portfolio assessment; and
    iii. on the basis of other criteria where ATAR was not a factor (e.g. special consideration, audition alone, schools recommendation scheme where no ATAR threshold applies);
c. reporting data on applications and offers for the last full year or year-to-date as is most relevant to inform the next round of applicants – as also set out in section 2; and
d. updating terms where necessary to remove implied hierarchies and replace with objective descriptive terms – as set out in section 3.

A fifth proposal, provision of selection rank data, that reflects the ATAR as adjusted for other factors, to provide information about school leaver cut off and distribution is considered a possible longer-term option but is not recommended at this time. Some issues regarding this are canvassed in section 4.

At each stage below, reference is made to whether the use is to inform potential students or to drive public reporting.

1. Grouping of applicants

The starting point for the HESP is that individuals will approach the system identifying themselves by their previous education experience – i.e. their pathway into higher education. The point of this classification is to channel information so an individual is not overwhelmed by learning about every possible approach; rather the intention is to enable prospective students to start with the information most relevant to them. This approach also aligns with how government reports on applications and offers for places in higher education by the main qualification on which the offer was made – the basis of admission.

This proposed grouping of applicants does not necessarily say anything about how higher education providers or tertiary admission centres actually assess those people. That is the second stage.

The IWG proposes four broad groups to categorise the basis for admission to higher education, as follows:

Group a. Recent secondary education

- Primarily for those who have completed Year 12 within the last two years, but also includes those who may have completed their senior secondary studies with a TAFE or other vocational education and training provider in the same timeframe.
- Limiting this group to those completing secondary studies in the two previous calendar years ensures data consistency and meets the need to understand the outcome for the current or near-to-current year 12 cohort.
- It also seems likely that people who completed year 12 several years or decades ago will not consider themselves the same as a recent school leaver – they will want to know about people more like them.

Group b. Previous higher education study

- Includes study at university and non-university higher education providers, whether recent (such as students seeking to transfer to another higher education provider or changing course at the same provider) or some time ago.
- Such applicants may have other qualifications also; notably a Year 12 certificate or previous vocational education and training qualification. However, their past higher education performance is likely to be most relevant in guiding future application options.
- Includes students who have completed a bridging or enabling course delivered by or on behalf of a higher education provider.

Group c. Previous vocational education training (VET) study

- Includes study at a public TAFE or other VET provider, whether a qualification was completed or not.
- May have other qualifications such as a Year 10 or Year 12 secondary school certificate.

Group d. Work and life experience

- "Experience" could include a combination of factors sufficient to demonstrate readiness for higher education. Includes mature age entry, professional experience whether completion of the Special Tertiary Admission Test (STAT) is required or not.
- Includes students who completed Year 12 more than two years previously and have undertaken no other study since leaving school.
- Covers those who need some preparatory support to be ready for tertiary education by undertaking a bridging, enabling or other foundational skills course.

For reporting purposes, each person should be allocated to <u>one category only</u>. This will require an agreed hierarchy where a person has multiple previous educational outcomes. The proposed ordering, with the applicant allocated to the first eligible group, is:

- Completion of some or all of a higher education qualification – to Group b.

- Completion of some or all of an AQF IV or higher VET qualification since leaving school – to Group c.
- Year 12 certificate with ATAR in previous two years – to Group a.
- none of the above – to Group d.

Many school students undertake VET certificates, commonly certificates II and III but potentially IV. While such study may be taken into account by a tertiary admission centre or higher education provider in determining whether to offer the person a place in higher education, for reporting purposes, if an ATAR was allocated for completion of Year 12, this should take precedence over any VET study completed while at school to determine which category of applicants the person falls into.

Information to ensure applicant understanding

Applicants from each of the four groups need to understand to a reasonable level the basis for assessing their claim. This information should be made available at both the whole-of-institution level (for eligibility criteria, application processes and general information that are relevant to all or most courses on offer) and at course level (for eligibility criteria and other information that is specific to that course, such as prerequisites and course-specific ATAR thresholds, etc.).

The information made available by institutions needs to outline the assessment types that will be used where relevant to the applicant, covering both previous formal educational achievements and any other means used to determine the applicant's suitability and readiness for higher education such as:

- any ATAR thresholds that may apply
- scholastic aptitude tests the applicant must undertake
- any interview requirements
- audition or portfolio assessment required
- pre-requisite study requirements and any bridging programs that may strengthen applicants' claims
- other preparatory programs that may be relevant.

2. Reporting issues

Recent secondary education subgroups

The HESP report proposed disaggregating the "recent secondary education" category into three subgroups, according to the extent to which the student's ATAR was critical to the assessment.

The proposed three subgroups are:

a. on the basis of ATAR alone (OP in QLD) or ATAR with the impact of some adjustment factors relevant to the applicant (e.g. 'ATAR bonus points' or reduced ATAR threshold);

b. on the basis of a combination of ATAR along with other requirements such as an additional test, interview, audition or portfolio assessment; and

c. on the basis of other criteria and ATAR was not a factor (e.g. special consideration, audition alone, schools recommendation scheme where no ATAR threshold applies)

The distinction between use of ATAR and no use of the ATAR is feasible to determine in TAC and university practice. The distinction between an assessment solely on the basis of ATAR and where

ATAR was a factor but other factors were also considered may be harder to define to ensure consistency and avoid data manipulation. At present this distinction is not captured in administrative data in the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS). A future enhancement to HEIMS is planned in order to do so.

The question of whether students who have some adjustment factors applied to consideration of their ATAR, and which category these most appropriately fall into – ATAR alone or ATAR plus other factors – has also been considered. The HESP took the view that these were more like those where ATAR alone was used, given no additional effort, test or assessment is required. In most cases, such adjustments to the applicant's selection rank or the threshold they are required to meet occurs automatically with no intervention from the student themselves. At some institutions, the majority of ATAR-based applicants may have some adjustment applied through the use of various types of 'bonus points', etc.

On balance, the IWG agrees that students who have had equity, subject or other types of bonus points or ATAR-related adjustments taken into account, but no other additional test or assessment, should be grouped with those whose selection rank is based solely on their ATAR.

Others

There are no proposals to break up the data for non-school leaver entry pathways by the assessment process. Hence no terminological issues emerge.

What period of offers is covered?

The data on previous year admission outcomes, both the national Department of Education and Training reporting and provider-level information about applicant numbers and ATAR outcomes tend to focus on admissions to the first teaching period of a year. New applications for later teaching periods are generally not captured in year-to-date reporting.

A key recommendation by the HESP was that reporting of the range of ATARs offered places in a course on the basis of ATAR (or ATAR with other factors) include the impact of ***all*** offer rounds. That means that any early offers made before the end of the school year subject to meeting a minimum ATAR threshold should be included, as should any offers made subsequent to the main offer round, either at the start of the year or for admission to later semesters or trimesters.

In practice, however, the IWG recognises that the most relevant data to inform prospective students may be different at different times of the year. For applicants for a mid-year intake, it is the outcomes of offers at the start of the year that will likely be most informative, rather than data from the previous calendar year.

The IWG therefore proposes that:

- **Full year data be available for applicants to semester/trimester one**
  To inform prospective applicants for entry to semester or trimester one, student profiles and ATAR ranges should be based on the most recent full year of offers data. Note the "full year" referred to is all of the offers for a place that commenced during that year. This could include offers that were actually made during the previous year for a place that commenced in the next year. The full year data could also be finalised as soon as all places for the year had commenced.

- **Year-to-date data be optional for applicants to semester/trimester two or three**
  To inform prospective students seeking to enter study in semester two or trimesters two or three, the provider may choose whether to continue using figures from the most recent full year of offers data or, instead, provide more up-to-date data drawn from offers made to commence study in the current year-to-date.

3. Terms to update

"ATAR cut-off" and "Clearly in ATAR"

A key recommendation of the HESP was to adopt common terms for concepts that mean the same thing. The most prominent example of this in current admissions parlance is the terms "ATAR cut-off" and "Clearly in ATAR". Both of these terms are generally defined as the lowest ATAR to which an offer of a place in a course was made in the main round of offers for semester one.

Another key recommendation by the HESP was to include the impact of all rounds of offers in any ATAR-related thresholds or reporting, in order to minimise the opportunity for providers to 'game' the figures – e.g. by making only a limited number of offers in the main round in order to produce a high "ATAR cut-off" or "Clearly in ATAR"; but admitting students with much lower ATARs through early offers or in subsequent offer rounds.

To resolve this issue, the IWG proposes that the terms "ATAR cut-off" and "Clearly in ATAR" both be abandoned and replaced with functional descriptive terms that effectively include the definition in the term itself. The following proposed changes are also reflected in the draft course admission information set (see Appendix D):

- **Lowest ATAR to which an offer was made in [year] (exclusive of any adjustment factors)**

As indicated, this figure should always be reported without the impact of any ATAR-related adjustment factors such as equity or subject bonus points or alternatively where the ATAR threshold may have been lowered due to equity considerations.

This unadjusted figure must always be reported when describing the ATAR profile of applicants offered places or those who enrolled in a course. Where there is a desire to report a figure that includes the impact of bonus points, etc., in addition to the unadjusted figure, the following term is proposed:

- **Lowest adjusted ATAR to which an offer was made in [year] (including the impact of any adjustment factors)**

The term "adjusted ATAR" is in one sense technically inaccurate. The ATAR itself never changes. Any adjustment factors such as bonus points actually modify the selection rank rather than the ATAR. But while acknowledging this, the IWG considers that "adjusted ATAR" is a term which will be readily understood. Using this term also avoids having to go to the potentially much more complex route of adopting common usage of "selection rank" in admissions discussion.

Not all institutions use ATAR adjustment factors. For those that do not, it is not necessary to publish this figure.

- **Minimum ATAR required for consideration to enter in next intake**

This term is for use where a minimum floor ATAR for consideration applies to a course or an institution – below which an application will not be considered. Achieving such a minimum ATAR would not provide a guarantee of entry. Indeed the lowest ATAR offered a place may be much higher. But such a figure would signal that no recent secondary education applicant with an ATAR below this figure will be considered.

Hierarchical language

Some of the terms in use reflect the assumption that a standard applicant is a school leaver assessed by academic ranking with an offer at some point early in January. Examples include any use of 'standard', 'alternate', 'alternative', 'special', 'early', 'main' and 'bonus'.

The IWG considers those terms should also be replaced with descriptive terms relevant to the issue. Proposed revisions to terminology are outlined below and reflected in the draft course admission information set (Appendix D):

- 'Bonus points' carry a hint of undeserved advantage inconsistent with their intent. This term should be replaced or transitioned to 'adjustment factors'.
- The Universities Admissions Centre (NSW/ACT) is moving to identify offer rounds by the month in which they are made. A numbering system, such as 'offer round 1', 'offer round 2', etc., might also help to distinguish between them, should this be necessary.
- 'Direct application' has little meaning for an applicant. This should be replaced with 'Applied through TAC' and 'Applied to provider/university'.
- 'Early entry' schemes are not an 'entry' that is early but an offer of a place, and only early against the assumption we should wait for the 'main' round. An alternative term is proposed as follows:

  At School offer scheme: An application pathway whereby an offer of enrolment is made to a secondary school student prior to completion of year 12 certificate. These are sometimes conditional on other requirements being met, e.g. successful completion of year 12 certificate or achievement of a minimum ATAR.

4. The assessment of applicants

The common assumption is that:

- school leavers are assessed based on their school results, with the ATAR the prime ranking of those results;
- applicants with previous higher education and/or VET qualifications or outcomes are assessed based on that; and
- other applicants demonstrate suitability through various means including aptitude tests, preparatory courses and work experience.

In practice, each higher education provider may use all of the above to assess the suitability of an applicant. Particularly where places available in a course are limited, factors over and above a recent school leaver's ATAR may be the determining factor in an institution choosing to make an offer to one applicant over another. Sometimes different courses within the same institution will consider

different sets of information – or perhaps weight the same information differently – in order to rank applicants.

This does not undermine the grouping of the individuals by their educational background, but makes clear the need for applicants to understand that all educational claims may be relevant.

School leavers: Selection rank and ATAR

For applicants applying through a TAC and for most universities, applicants to a course are allocated a "selection rank" that combines the applicant's ATAR with contributions from all other relevant evidence of aptitude for higher education study that the person may have – such as any VET or higher education courses undertaken, past employment experience, community engagement, results from the STAT, etc., and, of course, any equity-related or subject adjustment factors a school leaver may attract. For a recent Year 12 student with no employment experience and no ATAR-related adjustment factors, their selection rank will likely be based solely on their ATAR; however many applicants bring a range of other experiences and evidence that can support their claim to a place in higher education.

It is this selection rank that most universities actually use in determining who to make an offer to – not simply the ATAR. The formulas used to calculate selection ranks, however, are different for each institution and sometimes for different courses within an institution. The applicant's interest is to assess how likely it is they will receive an offer and who else may be in the course, with the past year outcome a guide. For this, the selection rank of those previously successful could be more useful than the ATAR alone, despite being a more complex and more difficult concept to understand.

At present, only one TAC – WA's Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC) – provides information to all applicants on their selection ranks at each of the four public universities. In states with a greater number of universities, providing information on selection ranks would likely be complex and confusing. Selection ranks are allocated to all applicants, though, not just those with an ATAR. Judging where a particular ATAR would likely rank you relative to, say, a mature age applicant with professional experience, would be both difficult and unproductive.

Part of the public's interest is to see what happens to school leavers with various school outcomes.

This would lead to two sets of information about school leavers:

- the school leaver ATAR-adjusted selection rank cut off and distribution; and
- data about the outcome of applications from school leavers by ATAR.

The IWG acknowledges that there is a desire within the higher education sector to engage more explicitly with applicants around selection ranks and the contributions that a range of factors can make to influence these ranks. This could potentially be adopted as a longer-term ambition. To make selection rank the main focus in the short-term, however – e.g. to discard the use of ATAR in reporting and observational data on higher education admissions – would require the explanation of a much more complex narrative around how admissions are managed. Selection ranks are not directly comparable between providers and even between some courses within providers, which would limit the usefulness of any national reporting based on them.

Discarding ATAR as the primary metric for competitive admissions would also have the effect of severing the current direct link between senior secondary school performance – as measured by the ATAR – and eligibility for the offer of a place in higher education. Such a shift is beyond the remit of the IWG's terms of reference, but may also be less transparent than the public's current understanding of the link between ATAR and entrance to higher education, imperfect though that understanding may be.

Appendix C: Draft whole-of-institution admissions information set

[**INSTRUCTIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS**: This information set outlines the collection of information about an institution's admission policies and processes that is considered necessary to enable a prospective student to gauge and compare the general admission requirements, application options and processes and institutional student profile across multiple providers.

The categories of information and core data to be made available to prospective students are specified below; however providers, tertiary admission centres and other users may choose to include additional textual content and adapt the overall presentation to distinguish and reflect their mission, course offerings and approach to information provision.

The Australian Government and all key higher education sector stakeholders have accepted the recommendations of the Higher Education Standards Panel that this information set is needed to inform student choice and should be available for every Australian higher education provider. While it is agreed the information should be available online, the location for such information is not specified. Institutions are expected to include this information on their own website in a location that prospective students can access readily; they are also encouraged to use other appropriate platforms that prospective students search for information.

Regardless of where it is located, however, this information set specification should be used as a guide to the types and minimum required content that must be included. The style and specifics of information presented could vary depending on the nature and size of institution concerned. Wherever the information is presented, the *specified core information* should be provided in such a way that minimises any appearance of difference, where none exists.

DELETE ALL BLUE INSTRUCTION TEXT WHEN COMPLETE]

[Insert Name of Higher Education Provider]

1. About [Name of Higher Education Provider]

[General information about studying at the institution, such as campus locations, information about open days (including campus visits), important dates (including enrolment dates).

Contact details, including online and in-person options, if available.]

2. Student profile

The table below provides data on students that commenced undergraduate study in the most recent full year of intake, including students admitted through all offer rounds and international students studying in Australia.

[See notes - Numbers less than five masked to maintain privacy. Where necessary, an additional cell should also be masked to prevent derivation]

	Most recent full year of commencements	
Primary basis of admission	**Number of students**	**Percentage of all students**
Recent secondary education • Students admitted solely on the basis of ATAR (including adjusted ATAR, e.g. with bonus points) • Students admitted where ATAR was one of several factors considered (e.g. portfolio, audition, additional test, early offer) • Students admitted on the basis of other criteria and ATAR was ***not*** a factor (e.g. special consideration, audition alone, schools recommendation scheme)		
Previous tertiary education • Students admitted on the basis of earlier higher education study (includes a bridging or enabling course) • Students admitted on the basis of earlier vocational education and training (VET) study		
Work and life experience • Students admitted on a basis other than the above		
Total domestic students		
Total international students		
All students		**100.0%**

Notes:

- L/N - Low numbers: the number of students is less than 5.
- N/A - Data not available for this item.
- N/P – Not published: the number is hidden to prevent calculation of numbers in cells with less than 5 students.
  [The values of suppressed cells can be approximated by using the totals and subtracting the values of some other cells, but only to within 5 students of the actual number, thereby retaining the confidentiality of the cells marked "L/N".]

3. Admission requirements

A. Australian secondary studies

Recent Australian Year 12 students (within the past two years)

[General information on how ATARs are used by the provider and TAC, how International Baccalaureate (IB) ATAR equivalence is generated, and other information of relevance at the institutional level. A note should send prospective students to the relevant course information set for details on specific courses.]

ATAR-related adjustments

[Information on the types of adjustments to ATAR-based admissions (e.g. 'bonus points') commonly available for courses at the institution. All types of equity, subject, elite performance or other adjustment factors should be detailed where these are available, including the maximum available for each type and overall. Any other available ATAR-related adjustments or considerations should also be detailed such as any reduction in ATAR threshold applicable for equity considerations where bonus points might not be used.]

Requirements that may apply in addition to ATAR

[Information on the range of additional tests, portfolio assessments, auditions or other types of evidence that may be required in some cases, over and above a competitive ATAR.]

Other admission options

[Detail all non-ATAR admission options available to recent school leavers. This should include all possible alternative application or assessment options where ATAR is not considered – e.g. special consideration due to illness or family disruption, audition alone where ATAR is not considered, schools recommendation scheme where no ATAR threshold is applied in addition. Elite athlete or performer schemes could also be included here if not handled via ATAR-related adjustment factors.]

Previous Australian Year 12 studies

[Indicate how students are assessed and selected if they completed Year 12 some time ago and have no tertiary study experience.]

Interstate Year 12

[Indicate how students are assessed and selected if they completed Year 12 in another state or territory.]

B. Applicants with previous higher education study

[Indicate how students are assessed and selected if they have undertaken higher education, including a description of credit transfer arrangements and recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes.]

Completed bridging or enabling course

[Indicate how students are assessed and selected if they have completed a bridging or enabling course.]

C. Applicants with previous vocational education and training (VET) study

[Indicate how students are assessed and selected if they have undertaken vocational education and training, including a description of any credit transfer arrangements (e.g. from a partner VET provider) and RPL processes.]

D. Domestic applicants with overseas qualifications

[Indicate how Australian citizens or permanent residents with overseas qualifications are assessed.]

E. Applicants with work and life experience

[Populate with information on how students may be assessed if they do not have formal tertiary or secondary educational qualifications, such as through the use of tertiary preparation certificate, special tertiary admissions test (STAT) and other pathway programs. Where this may vary depending on specific courses this should be stated and prospective students directed to specific course information.]

4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

[Provide information about any admission options specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants.]

5. Bridging and enabling courses

[Detail bridging and enabling course options available and where to go to access more information about them.]

6. How to apply

[Provide information on how to apply for courses (with links to further information as appropriate), including:

- Through a TAC
- Via direct application to the institution
- Via pre-selection ('early entry') arrangements

Also to be included here is general guidance on the overall admissions process, how long the process is expected to take, and how applicants will be notified of decisions.]

7. Enrolment

[Information on the enrolment process once an offer of a place has been received, such as:

- Acceptance of offer
- Advanced standing/academic credit/recognition of prior learning (RPL)
- Deferment
- Fees and charges]

8. Appeals and grievances

[Outline the appeals and grievances processes available for those who wish to dispute enrolment and admission decisions.]

9. Financial assistance *(optional)*

[Information on financial assistance available to help with the costs of study, such as:

- Youth and student allowances
- Loans
- Scholarships]

10. Student and campus services *(optional)*

[Information about the services available on campus, including a URL for further information. This section could include information about:

- accommodation
- careers
- chaplaincy
- childcare
- counselling
- exchange programs
- health services
- library/computing services
- learning assistance
- sports and recreation
- student organisations
- services for students with disabilities
- transport
- union
- welfare services.]

11. Where to get further information

[Provide links to other relevant information providers, including but not limited to:

- TEQSA national register
- QILT website
- Relevant TAC website]

Appendix D: Draft course admission information set

[**INSTRUCTIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS**: This information set outlines the collection of information that is considered necessary to enable a prospective student to gauge and compare study options, course admission requirements and their likely student peer cohort across multiple courses, providers and admission options. It can be used to outline the options and requirements for a single course or related group of courses, particularly where the individual courses are very small.

The categories of information and core data to be made available to prospective students are specified below; however providers, tertiary admission centres and other users may choose to include additional textual content and adapt the overall presentation to distinguish and reflect their mission, course offerings and approach to information provision.

The Australian Government and all key higher education sector stakeholders have accepted the recommendations of the Higher Education Standards Panel that this information set is needed to inform student choice and should be available for every Australian higher education course offered. While it is agreed the information should be available online, the location for such information is not specified. Institutions are expected to include this information on their own website in a location that prospective students can access readily; they are also encouraged to use other appropriate platforms that prospective students search for information.

Regardless of where it is located, however, this information set specification should be used as a guide to the types and minimum required content that must be included. The style and specifics of information presented could vary depending on whether the information covers a single course or several related courses. The aggregation used could also be different in different contexts – e.g. at field of study level on an institution faculty web page, but at individual course level on a tertiary admission website – or vice-versa. Wherever the information is presented, the *specified core information* should be provided in such a way that minimises any appearance of difference where none exists.

As a general rule, it is not necessary to repeat information about application processes that applies to all courses at an institution and is set out in the *Whole-of-Institution Admissions Information Set*. However, where there are entry requirements or application processes that are different to those that generally apply to other courses, they should be detailed here.

DELETE ALL BLUE INSTRUCTION TEXT WHEN COMPLETE]]

[Insert Name of Higher Education Provider]

[Insert Name of Course/Course Group]

1. Essential requirements to enter this course

[This section is to outline any minimum criteria that all students will need to meet in order to be admitted to this course, regardless of their admission pathway. This should include any course pre-requisites or inherent requirements (e.g. physical requirements). Items that do not directly impact admissions but which will be requirements during the course (for instance, working with children checks), may be included as appropriate.]

2. Entry options

A. Recent Australian Year 12 students (within the past two years)

ATAR-based admission [if relevant (OP in QLD)]

(For applicants who will be selected wholly or partly on the basis of ATAR)

- Lowest ATAR to which an offer was made in [year] (exclusive of any bonus points or other adjustment factors): XX
  [This is the lowest ATAR (excluding adjustments) that was offered a place in the course in the previous year, as an indication of what may be required in the coming year]
- Lowest adjusted ATAR to which an offer was made in [year] (including the impact of any equity and other adjustment factors) [only if relevant]: XX
  [This is the lowest ATAR or selection rank (including adjustments) that was offered a place in the course in the previous year, as an indication of what may be required in the coming year]

- Minimum ATAR required for consideration to enter in next intake [if relevant]: XX
  [This refers to any floor below which an application will not be considered by the provider. It is not a guaranteed entry. Reference could be made to the tables at 6. Student Profile, below, to illustrate this point.]

  Details of any admission requirements that may apply ***in addition*** to ATAR requirements:
  - e.g. early offer scheme where there is still a minimum ATAR threshold requirement
  - e.g. requirement to pass an interview or audition.

ATAR-related adjustments [if different to the whole of institution rules (OP in QLD)]

Details of the types of bonus points and other ATAR-related adjustments commonly available to applicants are set out in the institution's general admissions policy at [hyperlink to whole-of-institution information set].

[Also set out here information on any types of adjustments to ATAR-based admissions available that are specific to this course or different to those commonly available for courses at the institution – e.g. subject bonuses available for having studied a related senior secondary subject.]

ATAR range for those offered places in [most recent full year or current year-to-date, whichever is most relevant (OP in QLD)]

[Provide data on the ATAR range from the most relevant recent cohort. This information should include the impact of offer rounds in the relevant period. If year-to-date figures are used – e.g. following the conclusion of first semester intake – the data must include any early offers relating to that intake that may actually have been made in the previous calendar year.]

(Across all offer rounds) [Note: this table only relates to students selected on the basis of ATAR alone or ATAR in combination with other factors. To ensure comparability across all providers, the figures used must be the original unadjusted figures without the impact of bonus points or other adjustments. Students selected on the basis of special consideration should not be included in this table.]	**Excluding adjustment factors** [required]	**Including adjustment factors** [optional – and only if relevant]
Lowest ATAR to receive an offer		
25th percentile ATAR to receive an offer		
Median ATAR to receive an offer		
75th percentile ATAR to receive an offer		
Highest ATAR to receive an offer		

Other admission options

(For applicants who will be selected on a basis other than ATAR)

[Information on other application pathways that may be suitable for recent secondary students, especially those who do not meet or are not required to meet specified ATAR requirements.
- Pathway 1 – e.g. pre-selection schemes
- Pathway 2 – e.g. Indigenous admission scheme
- Pathway 3 – e.g. disability admission scheme
- Pathway 4 – e.g. elite sports or artistic performance admission scheme
- Pathway 5 – special consideration (for students whose ATAR achievement has been compromised by specific situations beyond the applicants' control).]

B. Applicants with previous higher education study

[Information relevant to people who have undertaken recent or previous higher education study since leaving school, including academic credit transfer arrangements and any required additional criteria (e.g. interview or audition).]

Completed bridging or enabling course

[Information relevant to students who have completed a bridging course to develop knowledge in a specific field or discipline that is a prerequisite to this course and students who have completed an enabling or foundation course to prepare them for further university study.]

C. Applicants with previous vocational education and training study

[Information relevant to people who have undertaken recent or previous vocational education and training (VET) study, including formal RPL arrangements etc.]

D. Applicants with work and life experience

[Information relevant to people applying not on the basis of prior education participation, including admission via the Special Tertiary Admissions Test or any other admission tests, or on the basis of relevant professional or employment experience.]

3. Bridging and enabling courses

[Information on any relevant bridging courses to provide potential students with the skills and knowledge required for this course.]

[Information on any relevant enabling or foundation courses.]

4. Advanced standing/academic credit/recognition of prior learning (RPL)

You may be entitled to credit for prior learning, whether formal or informal. Formal learning can include previous study in higher education, vocational education, or adult and community education. Informal learning can include on the job learning or various kinds of work and life experience. Credit can reduce the amount of study needed to complete a degree.

For further information about credit and recognition of prior learning please see [Link to further information about advanced standing, RPL] or contact [contact details for relevant credit arrangements]

[A list of formal RPL agreements that lead into this course could be included or linked to at this point.]

5. Where to get further information

[Directions and links to other relevant information – e.g. the institution's homepage, the relevant tertiary admission centre/s, the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) website, the National Admission Information Platform (when available).]

[Applicants with atypical application pathways not outlined above (e.g. Baccalaureate or international schooling) should be assisted here.]

6. Student profile

The tables below provide data on undergraduate students that commenced in this course in the most recent full year of intake, including students admitted through all offer rounds and international students studying in Australia.

[See notes - Numbers less than five masked to maintain privacy. Where necessary, an additional cell should also be masked to prevent derivation]

	Most recent full year of commencements	
Primary basis of admission	**Number of students**	**Percentage of all students**
Recent secondary education • Students admitted solely on the basis of ATAR (including adjusted ATAR, e.g. with bonus points) • Students admitted where ATAR was one of several factors considered (e.g. portfolio, audition, additional test, early offer) • Students admitted on the basis of other criteria and ATAR was ***not*** a factor (e.g. special consideration, audition alone, schools recommendation scheme)		
Previous tertiary education • Students admitted on the basis of earlier higher education study (includes a bridging or enabling course) • Students admitted on the basis of earlier vocational education and training (VET) study		
Work and life experience • Students admitted on a basis other than the above		
Total domestic students		
Total international students		
All students		**100.0%**

Notes:

- L/N - Low numbers: the number of students is less than 5.
- N/A - Data not available for this item.
- N/P – Not published: the number is hidden to prevent calculation of numbers in cells with less than 5 students.
  [The values of suppressed cells can be approximated by using the totals and subtracting the values of some other cells, but only to within 5 students of the actual number, thereby retaining the confidentiality of the cells marked "L/N".]

7. How to apply

[Provide information on how to apply for courses (with links to further information as appropriate), including:

- Through a TAC
- Via direct application to the institution
- Via pre-selection ('early entry') arrangements.]