

Submission in response to the Australian University Accord's Interim Report

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The Interim Report supports the further expansion in higher education attainment.

In my initial submission to the Accord I argued the need to address the school to tertiary transition.

The Higher Education Standards Panel's submission (HESP submission) to the Accord process highlights the spread of education outcomes across States and Territories for young Australians at the age to complete year 12.

The HESP submission makes clear that there are three sets of young Australians:

1. those doing the ATAR eligible package, the ATAR as course of study, more than a ranking. The school systems see this as distinct and designed for universities;
2. those completing year 12 with certificate but choosing or being allocated into a non-ATAR study package; and
3. those who do not complete year 12.

Any desire to raise the target by the Accord would require admissions to expand further down the ATAR ranks (for those with one) and attract more of those without.

HESP submission Table One: Education outcomes by end of Year 12 (2021)

	Estimated population	%SSCE without ATAR	%SSCE with ATAR	% IB	% non SSCE or IB
NSW	92,218	14%	59%	1%	26%
ACT	5,243	30%	54%	3%	13%
VIC	73,432	22%	62%	1%	15%
Qld	63,685	38%	43%	1%	18%
SA-NT	23,224	31%	57%	2%	10%
WA	31,774	46%	33%	0%	21%
Tasmania	6,154	26%	32%	1%	42%
Australia	295,730	26%	53%	1%	20%

The balance between SSCE with ATAR eligible package and those without, of roughly one third not pursuing an ATAR eligible package, (over half in WA), does not sit well with an ambition for more higher education attainment. It explains why universities, other than seven of the Group of Eight, have greatly expanded non-ATAR selection for recent school leavers. It is not to sidestep ATAR but because they are seeking school leavers who do not have one. WA illustrates this most clearly – that UWA is explicit in seeking out the full set of school leavers the clear signifier.

This could continue.

Or there could be a thorough look at why the school systems maintain a bifurcated set of studies for university entrance and general studies not aimed at university entrance when in reality both sets of students are the target for university entrance.

Various options are set out below.

1. Restore the ATAR package as the predominant basis for higher education entry and the stand out benchmark. With consequence that
 - higher education cannot expand much, indeed might need to shrink or

- need to ramp up take up of the ATAR package in SSCE, especially in Qld and WA (and Tasmania) to force numbers with traditional school outcome to match future demand for HE graduates.
2. Continue to expand and promote what appears to be happening now:
- ATAR based entry for those who pursue that SSCE path;
 - non-ATAR pathways for those who choose a SSCE non ATAR package, making this better known and accepted.

This creates the risk of more students choosing the non-ATAR study package – a risk as the schools see it.

3. Leave the SSCE packages intact (labeling something like University oriented, and General, for all futures) but make the ATAR a serious cohort rank that is calculated for the whole SSCE group. This accepts that those who leave or do not complete are impossible to attach a rank to, even though they are in the mix.
- To use a bad science analogy, if everyone in the age group is an electron, they float around all the numbered spaces from 0.00 to 99.95 but right now only a subset are determined to be precisely somewhere.
 - Change this so that as many of the electrons are located as possible – everyone who receives a SCCE or VET in school certificate.

You could call this a Selection Rank. It retains emphasise on a desire or need to rank before offering places.

4. Suggest to schools and universities that the senior secondary split of ATAR eligible package and other needs a major revamp, designed with intent that many to most will be in the running for a higher education place
- Align those outcomes to benchmarks of suitability for higher education
 - Allow a ranking of those who want to be in running for the selective courses that will no doubt continue.

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