

The South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC) provides VET and HE admissions (undergraduate and postgraduate) services to its member and fee-for-service institutions operating in South Australia and the Northern Territory. SATAC is one of six Tertiary Admissions Centres (TACs) in Australia, which separately provide tertiary admissions services in their state/territory and collectively maintain a national tertiary admissions system together with VET and HE providers.

The Accord discussion paper notes the scale and rate of change in the knowledge, skills and technologies needed to transform Australia's economy and the challenge this creates for the tertiary education sector. The review terms of reference also include the importance of increasing access and opportunity (TOR 2) and connection between VET and HE (TOR 5). We believe that a well-resourced national admissions system can be a key enabler to addressing some of the challenges faced by the sector and delivering improved outcomes for students.

We have sought to address the questions raised in the discussion paper that we feel are most relevant to SATAC/tertiary admissions and where we can add value to the discussion. In our submission below we have summarised our thoughts to save information being repeated in response to multiple questions. Broadly, we have responded to Section 3.3 Connection between the VET and HE systems and Section 3.5 Creating opportunity for all Australians.

TACs provide a trusted one-stop-shop for applicants in relation to researching, applying and receiving offers for courses of interest. SATAC through its membership has for many years provided VET and HE (undergraduate and postgraduate) admissions services and every year helps tens of thousands of applicants understand and navigate the available options and pathways to tertiary study.

Historically this has been achieved through a range of engagement and education approaches including in-person and online school community information sessions, SATAC publications and tools including the SATAC Guide and online course search (combining VET and HE), participation in open days and career expos, and the provision of multi-channel applicant support.

SATAC is currently transforming the online applicant user experience to establish a streamlined, personalised experience and account structure to facilitate the application and offer process as well as lifelong learning with participating institutions.

This initiative will establish new data points which, combined with existing data points will provide a better understanding of applicant behaviour and potential barriers to application and acceptance, such that we can proactively engage with applicants to encourage and support them through the process.

Working with key stakeholders and relevant datasets, we intend to develop predictive data models to understand the likelihood of tertiary participation and success for different learners and pathways such that learner engagement and admissions pathways can be designed to deliver improved outcomes in priority areas such as proportionate participation and success for students from under-represented groups.

The development of learner profiles for secondary students is also expected to provide a richer understanding of individual learners and inform new and innovative admissions pathways that extend beyond the traditional focus on subject grades and ATARs which are increasingly relevant for only a small number of strict quota courses and often accompanied by additional requirements.

While we are excited about the potential value of these and other initiatives, there is potential for inequitable applicant outcomes if they are not extended across the sector. This is also true for initiatives being implemented in other states and territories that may create inequity for learners and institutions outside of those states and territories.

Additionally, the investment in admissions capabilities, systems and innovation is currently being replicated across the sector by TACs and institutions. The accord process offers a unique opportunity to genuinely explore the establishment of a national tertiary admissions body and system to consolidate and focus sector investment to deliver long-term national priority outcomes.

The scale of a national body could enable greater admissions efficiencies, capabilities and innovation, as well as the potential for reduced/removal of applicant fees and improved applicant outcomes. For comparison, Australian universities and TACs collectively managed undergraduate applications from approximately 300,000 applicants in 2021, whereas UCAS (the national admissions body in the UK) managed applications from approximately 750,000 undergraduate and postgraduate applicants.

Currently, students can apply to universities directly or via application through a TAC. While Universities do not charge an application fee, TACS do as it funds the service. A national body of sufficient scale could reduce or remove application fees which we know can be a barrier to entry for potential applicants. Further, Government and/or Industry could fund application fees for priority student groups and courses to encourage participation in industries and roles where there is an existing or future projected skills shortage and provide better access and participation from a broader spectrum of students, including low represented groups.

A national body would also facilitate the capture of sector-wide data sets. These data sets could:

- Enable HE providers to tailor offerings and focus efforts in a targeted manner on local needs and engagement. Using broad, sector wide data, institutions would have an improved ability to better match learners with provider capabilities and drive strong education outcomes. Further this data set could assist with equity concerns by providing evidence-based information to support regional, first nations and other underrepresented student groups to pursue HE where they otherwise may not have.
- Provide rich sector-wide and local admissions insights to support institutions, industry and government in their forward planning and policy making.
- Allow Government to deliver data driven strategies to close gaps in skills required for industry that are needed for economic growth in Australia.

A national body could assist with deepening existing, and supporting the creation of new linkages, between VET, HE and Industry. As SATAC already works with both TAFE SA and the HE institutions in SA and NT we recognize the importance of having VET alongside and connected to HE to enable informed student choices regarding the best-fit study options. There is enduring value to students, institutions and industry in providing an objective one-stop shop for tertiary admissions.

This strong linkage on a national level would assist in the creation of learning profiles or personas to assist students, from High school onwards to understand how their passions, ways of learning and career aspirations can link together to form a meaningful career pathway with evidenced-based success rates. This approach could also be expanded to enable prospective international students.