

Higher Education Standards Panel Consultation Paper

Next steps on improving the transparency of higher education admissions: UNSW's response

Overview of request

In 2022, Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) has set new objectives and tasks with an aim to improve consistency and comparability of information about admission requirements for prospective higher education students across different courses and different providers. It builds on the previous work conducted by the higher education sector to improve the usefulness of information available to prospective domestic undergraduate students.

This paper seeks to extend the admission transparency requirements to:

- Include postgraduate coursework information
- Include undergraduate and postgraduate information for international students
- Enhance the reporting of ATARs for places offered to recent school leavers
- Overall feedback on admission transparency initiatives

General feedback

In principle UNSW is supportive of HESP's plan to improve transparency and comparability of admission information.

Included are UNSW recommendations in this submission and we look forward to being involved in any future discussions.

Proposed implementation timeline

HESP proposes to implement the set templates in time to meet the needs of applicants to study in the first teaching period of 2024.

HESP asks providers to have trial information sets for postgraduate courses, including international students, updated whole of institution admissions information and student profile tables in the first quarter of 2023.

HESP asks for all undergraduate and postgraduate programs be consistent with revised requirements by end of 2023 (final quarter).

Potential challenges:

- 2024 applications for international undergraduate and postgraduate students and domestic postgraduate students opened at UNSW in October 2022. Course information for 2024 will likely be finalised February-March 2023. Should the extended transparency requirements be required, additional work and resources will be required to update marketing collateral and websites. The University would appreciate this being factored into any recommended “go-live” timeframe.
- Page 13 of the consultation paper notes that it may be possible to include information for prospective undergraduate international and domestic and international postgraduate students within the Course Seeker website. If this is the case, institutions would require clear advice regarding how such information will be presented on Course Seeker, including agreed common definitions and interpretations. Currently information on domestic undergraduate admissions is provided to the Universities Admissions Centre (UAC) to feed directly into Course Seeker. As the new data is not currently collected by UAC for this purpose, a new process for providing this data needs to be considered, as do the resources to complete this on an ongoing basis.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS SUMMARY

Inclusion of postgraduate courses

- 1) ***Do you agree with the proposed two applicant grouping to target admission information to prospective postgraduate students?***
 - a. ***Completed higher education study, bachelor degree level or above***
 - b. ***Work, Study and/or life experience***

The general requirement for admission to a UNSW postgraduate coursework degree is completion of a recognised bachelor’s degree. The two applicant groupings proposed would be applicable to UNSW however further clarification is required where the two categories intersect, e.g. admission is on the basis of a completed higher education study AND professional work experience.

Although HESP advises the ‘*groupings should not be read as indicating how higher education providers might actually assess eligibility for applicants in each group*’, limiting the applicant grouping to just two categories may cause confusion amongst prospective applicants who may view the groupings as indicative of entry requirements.

To reduce confusion and any potential for misrepresentation of information, it will be important that terminology and standards be clearly defined and that all institutions adhere to them.

For example, further clarification is required for Group B Work, Study and/or life experience, with the Draft updated common terminology and data definitions in Appendix C Draft (page 38) stating that “Applicants without a completed or relevant bachelor’s degree or higher qualification should find the information they need here”. The reference to ‘without a... *relevant* bachelor’s degree’ could be interpreted as a completed but non-cognate bachelor’s degree.

Recommendations:



- HESP should consider introducing subcategories under Group A) Completed higher education study. Subcategories could include:
 - *Admitted solely based on Completed Higher education study, bachelor's degree level or above*
 - *Admitted where both a Completed Higher Education Study and additional criteria was considered (e.g. relevant work experience, portfolio entry, cognate field, Interview, aptitude tests)*
- *HESP should clarify Group B applicants and what is meant by 'Applicants without a...relevant bachelor's degree or higher qualifications'. Would this include applicants with a completed non-cognate higher education degree?*

2) What are your views on the proposed inclusion of information about the availability and allocation of Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) in postgraduate courses, which some students have indicated may assist in choosing the best course for their needs?

HESP proposes that providers make clear in their admission information:

- Whether there are Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) available for a course and
- If so, set out or provide links to information about the basis of on which those places are allocated.

UNSW is supportive of this proposal and understands that students need to make financially informed decisions when deciding what and where to study.

In general, the majority of our courses are either Commonwealth Supported or Fee Paying, with a small number of courses offering both CSP and Fee Paying places. We currently publish a list of courses that offer CSPs, including those with limited CSP offerings, and include information on CSP availability in the Fees & Scholarships section for relevant courses in our [Degree Finder](#).

This information is available below:

- <https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/csp/postgrad>
- <https://www.unsw.edu.au/study/your-future/commonwealth-supported-places>

For courses with limited CSPs, we advise applicants of the following:

- *"CSPs are competitive as there are limited places available."*
- *"Whilst the majority of postgraduate places at UNSW are Domestic Fee Paying there are certain courses which have an allocation of Commonwealth support funding. These places are limited in each course and even though they are listed below, do not guarantee a Commonwealth supported place if you are granted an offer of admission."*
- *On UAC - "Important: Offers are made on a rolling basis via UAC from October when domestic applications open. However, the limited CSP (Commonwealth-supported places) at UNSW Sydney are highly competitive and granted based on academic merit. Therefore, applicants who met the borderline rank will be placed on hold and will be considered at a later date. The outcome may take longer as the release of a CSP offer will depend on the availability, the acceptance rate, and the demand for the course. Applicants with a borderline rank will be notified of the outcome within 2-4 weeks prior to each intake."*



It would be relatively straightforward to update this with information on how CSPs are allocated.

Potential challenges

- As CSP availability and offerings are subject to variations in government funding, and funding is typically confirmed late in the year for the following year, applying standard CSP allocation rules to all applicants for a postgraduate course can be challenging. Confirmation of Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding early each year for the following year would allow more accurate and timely advice to students, and greater consistency in PG CSP being offered to students.

Inclusion of information for international Students

3) Do you agree with the proposed approach of integrating the minimum required admission information to enable course comparisons for international students without creating a separate applicant grouping?

UNSW currently publishes admission entry requirements for all courses regardless of residency status, therefore integrating the minimum required admission information as outlined in Appendix A: draft updated whole-of-institution admission information set (page 21) and Appendix B: Draft updated program/course admission information set (page 30) is possible.

Potential challenges:

If the objective of this requirement is to provide international students with information on course entry requirements and the ability to compare similar courses across institutions, there are some important challenges to note. For example, UNSW assessment of overseas qualifications, especially for postgraduate coursework degrees, may differ from other institutions. There is currently no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to assessing and converting international qualifications to an equivalent Australian mark. This is because each institution uses its own weightings and calculations to create an equivalent ATAR, Grade Point Average (GPA) or Weighted Average Mark (WAM).

For UNSW to commit to this requirement, more clarity is needed on what must be published – for example, will institutions be required to publish the minimum entry requirement for every course and for every overseas qualification, or will it be sufficient to simply state that the qualification needs to be equivalent to an Australian qualification (e.g. Australian senior secondary studies, Australian Bachelor degree, etc). The former will result in additional administrative compliance costs for this requirement on an ongoing basis, as well as requiring the development of a consistent assessment matrix to ensure applicants can accurately compare the requirements of similar courses across institutions.

4) Is it appropriate and workable to separate different cohorts of international students in the student profile tables on the same applicant grouping basis as domestic students (higher education, VET, Recent Secondary, work and life experience, etc.), rather than a single figure for international students as in the current information sets?

NOTE: If you are a provider, does your institution have data that would enable this approach?

While we currently capture the basis of admission for all offers to UNSW, more clarity is needed on the specific information that would need to be published and reported. If we are only required to publish student profiles for international undergraduate and postgraduate admission, then we are well placed to provide it.



However significant further investigation and development work would be required to include international student numbers in a Student Profile table. This would require additional resources and a review of internal processes to ensure the data is captured accurately.

Table 1: Sample Undergraduate student profile table provided by HESP. Table is available on page 55 of Report template

Undergraduate students

Applicant background	Australian		International	
	Number of students	Percentage of all students	Number of students	Percentage of all students
Full year intake 2021				
(A) Past higher education study (includes a bridging or enabling course)	1265	30.2%	632	15.1%
(B) Past vocational education and training (VET) study	356	8.5%	53	1.2%
(C) Work and life experience (Admitted on the basis of previous achievement not in the other three categories)	63	1.5%	-	0%
(D) Recent secondary education:				
• Admitted solely on the basis of ATAR (regardless of whether this includes the impact of adjustment factors such as equity or subject bonus points)	1530	36.5%	-	0%
• Admitted where both ATAR and additional criteria were considered (e.g. portfolio, audition, extra test, early offer conditional on minimum ATAR)	22	0.5%	-	0%
• Admitted on the basis of other criteria only and ATAR was not a factor (e.g. special consideration, audition alone, schools recommendation with no minimum ATAR)	45	1.1%	222	5.3%
Australian students	3281		78.3%	
International students	907		21.7%	
All students	4188		100.0%	

Notes: "<5" – the number of students is less than 5
 N/A – Students not accepted in this category
 N/P – Not published: the number is hidden to prevent calculation of numbers in cells with less than 5 students.

Table 2: Sample Postgraduate student profile table provided by HESP. Table is available on page 56 of Report template.

Postgraduate students

Applicant background	Australian		International	
	Number of students	Percentage of all students	Number of students	Percentage of all students
Full year intake 2021				
(A) Completed higher education study, bachelor degree level or above	592	65.0%	154	16.9%
(B) Work, study and/or life experience (Admitted on the basis of previous achievement not in the other category)	165	18.1%	-	0%
Australian students	757		83.1%	
International students	154		16.9%	
All students	911		100.0%	

Notes: "<5" – the number of students is less than 5
 N/A – Students not accepted in this category
 N/P – Not published: the number is hidden to prevent calculation of numbers in cells with less than 5 students.

Potential challenges:

The proposal only outlines the need to publish student profile information. Confirmation is required as to whether this data will also be required for TCSI government reporting. For example, will institutions be required to map the basis of admission to the following postgraduate student groups:

- a. Completed higher education study, bachelor’s degree level or above; and
- b. Work, study and/or life experience

5) What are your views on the proposed:



- a) ***inclusion of offshore students in enrolment profiles where they are studying and engaging with onshore students on an equal basis; and***
- b) ***exclusion of purely offshore course offerings, for instance courses offered at an overseas campus, as out of scope for this exercise?***

UNSW does not see the need to exclude offshore course offerings from the proposed requirements. We believe the changes should be applicable to all students studying an Australian qualification, regardless of whether the course is taught onshore or offshore. To ensure consistent and accurate information is available across all course offerings, we believe the same rigour should be applied regardless of where the course is offered.

Enhancing the reporting of ATARs for places offered to recent secondary students

- 6) ***Do you see any difficulty with including the ATARs of all recent secondary students offered a place in the ATAR profile table for a course?***

UNSW does not have any major concerns with including the ATARs of all recent secondary students offered a place in the ATAR profile table for a course.

Recommendation:

As noted in Report Template (page 19), 'some institutions have indicated they are changing the way secondary students are being admitted, with some giving less emphasis to the ATAR' and 'such changes in the process have the potential to reduce the usefulness of the reported ATAR profile to inform prospective students about their opportunity for and likelihood of admission to the affected courses. If they cannot see that students in their likely ATAR range are being admitted, they may not consider that course as a viable option.'

In line with this comment, UNSW believes the ATAR profile, in its current form, is not always an accurate representation of the student's likelihood to receive an offer to UNSW, especially when offers can be issued based on ATAR AND additional criteria, for example equity admission pathways.

UNSW recommends HESP considers allowing institutions the option to present two sets of ATAR profiles for – 1) non-equity cohorts 2) equity cohorts. This allows prospective students to assess what cohort they fall under and see the ATAR profile relevant to their circumstances.

Overall feedback on admissions transparency initiatives

- 7) ***Are there any other aspects of either the previously agreed common terminology definitions or information set specifications or the implementation of admissions transparency that you wish to provide comment on?***

UNSW appreciates if HESP can clarify the following:

- How should students entering via articulations be measured and reported?
- Some institutions process offers via an Internal Program Transfer. Should these offers be reported in the Student Profile?
- Are there any transparency requirements relating to English language proficiency for domestic and international students?



- Some institutions offer adjustment factor points to international students and/or overseas qualifications. How will this be monitored and reported?

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on this proposal. To further discuss any issue raised in this paper, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Raey Jasinski, our Head of Admissions and Scholarships at 02 9065 8727 or r.jasinski@unsw.edu.au.

