

The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) in NSW

In June 2009, the Universities Admission Index (UAI) is changing to the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

There are three changes:

- The university ranking system currently known as the UAI will now be known as the ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank).
- The highest rank will now be an ATAR of 99.95, as opposed to a UAI of 100.
- The ATAR will indicate a student's position in relation to the Year 12 students they began high school with.

The Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres (ACTAC) decided to adopt a common name for existing indices across all states and territories (except Queensland) to highlight that student ranks are reported on a common scale.

The top rank in NSW will now be an ATAR of 99.95, as opposed to a UAI of 100, to bring NSW students' ranks into line with their interstate peers.

Previously, students who left school early were not counted in the "reference cohort". The ATAR, however, will compare Year 12 students against all the students who entered Year 12 with them.

The change in reporting student ranks via the ATAR rather than the UAI can be compared to the change in temperature scales; where once we recorded a temperature as degrees Fahrenheit, we now record it as degrees Celsius: the actual temperature has not changed, just the name and scale have been changed.

What about the ACT UAI?

The ACT UAI will also change its name to the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) in 2009. In addition, the top rank will change from an ACT UAI of 100 to an ATAR of 99.95.

More information is available from the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies, call (02) 6205 7181.

There will be no practical consequences for students as:

- the rules for the ATAR are exactly the same as for the UAI
- marks will be scaled in the same way so the rank order of students will be the same
- the same applicants will be selected for the same courses, as any change in an ATAR compared to a UAI will see an equivalent change in course cut-offs.

Every Year 12 student will receive a letter at their home address explaining these changes.

On the back page we have included some of the frequently asked questions (FAQs) you may have about the change from UAI to ATAR. Further information is available on UAC's website, including:

- a complete UAI to ATAR conversion table
- a Powerpoint presentation for schools to use when explaining the changes to their students
- more FAQs about the change from UAI to ATAR
- a general publication – *FAQs about the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)*
- a more detailed publication – *The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank in NSW – A Technical Report*.
- a publication aimed at Year 12 students – *All about your ATAR*.

Reference copies of the three publications listed above will be sent to schools in July.

The *UAC 2010 Guide* will include detailed information about the ATAR, with a sample UAI to ATAR conversion table included on the reverse of the important dates bookmark. The *UAC 2010 Guide* will be distributed to schools in late July.

A printed copy of *All about your ATAR* will be sent to the home addresses of all NSW Year 12 students in early December, before ATARs are released.

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ATAR rules

The eligibility rules for the ATAR are the same as for the UAI.

To be eligible for an ATAR:

a student must satisfactorily complete at least ten units from Board developed courses for which there are examinations including at least:

- eight units from Category A courses
- two units of English
- three Board Developed courses of two units or greater
- four subjects.

What courses are included in the calculation of the ATAR?

The ATAR is based on an aggregate of scaled marks in ten units of ATAR courses comprising:

- the best two units of English
- the best eight units from the remaining units, which can include up to two units of Category B courses.



Introducing the ATAR

What has changed?

The only way the ATAR differs from the UAI is the name and the scale on which it is reported.

Why change the name?

The new name, Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), emphasises that a common scale is used by all states and territories (except Queensland) to report the ranks of Year 12 students and that the ATAR is a **rank**, not a mark.

Why change the top rank?

The number given to the maximum rank in NSW will now be an ATAR of 99.95, as opposed to a UAI of 100. This means that the top NSW students will receive the same rank as their interstate peers, where the top rank is 99.95.

Some students may be disappointed at not being able to obtain a rank of 100. One of the common mistakes people make is to think a score of 100 means a "perfect score": this is not the case. In the past, students who received a UAI of 100 were those who were better than 99.975% of their peers, and the aggregate marks of this top group have ranged from 480 to 498. There has never, in the past 30 years, been a student with a "perfect" aggregate of 500.

Achieving an ATAR of 99.95 is the same as achieving a UAI of 100 – you are in the top ranked group of students. The only difference is that the top ATAR corresponds to the top 0.05% of students rather than to the top 0.025% of students. Instead of having 18-23 students in the top group there are likely to be 45-50 students.

Why change the scale?

Currently the UAI indicates the position of students in relation to their Year 10 cohort. In contrast, the ATAR will indicate the position of students in relation to their Year 7 group, including those who left school before completing Year 10. The change in scale will be to include these early leavers – about 10% of the Year 7 cohort.

The minimum leaving age in NSW is being raised from 15 to 17 years. When this happens all students will complete Year 10, which will produce a small shift in the distribution of ranks. Rather than having this change occur after the other two changes, the decision was taken to make this change in 2009.

What will be the effect of the change in scale?

Including the early school leavers in the reference cohort will mean that almost all ATARs will be slightly higher than the equivalent UAIs. Some examples are given below, based on 2008 UAI data. This table should not be used to predict ATARs from UAIs in future years as equivalences

may change from year to year if the nature of the candidature changes.

The *UAC 2010 Guide* will include a brief UAI to ATAR conversion table. A complete conversion table is available on UAC's website.

UAI	ATAR
100	99.95
99.50	99.50
99.00	99.05
95.00	95.40
90.00	90.80
85.00	86.25
80.00	81.65
75.00	77.10
70.00	72.55
65.00	67.95
60.00	63.40
50.00	54.25
40.00	45.10

What happens at the top?

At the very top some ATARs will be less than the corresponding UAIs because the top rank is now 99.95. Because each UAI and each ATAR corresponds to a range of aggregates students on the same UAI may be split across two neighbouring ATARs. The table below shows the effect based on 2008 UAI data. The number of students with ATARs lower than the corresponding UAIs decreases rapidly. Even at the top, most students will receive a higher ATAR than the UAI they would have received.

UAI	Number of students with lower ATAR
99.95	23
99.90	15
99.85	9
99.80	3
99.75	2

What are the implications of these changes for students?

For all students the changes will have little effect. The scaling process will be the same and the rank order of students will be the same as determined by the aggregate mark. Only the number students get and the name it is given will be different. Any change in ATAR compared to a UAI will be compensated for by an equivalent change in the course cut-off. It will be neither easier nor more difficult for individual students to gain a place in their preferred university course.

What are the implications for universities?

Course cut-offs may change as a result of the different scale used for the ATAR but the

differences should not be large. In any event, course cut-offs vary from year to year because of the number of places available, the number of applications for those places and the quality of those applicants.

How is the ATAR calculated?

As in the past the first step is to rank the eligible Year 12 students on the basis of each student's scaled marks according to the ATAR rules (see page 1). The process used to scale marks has not changed.

The second step is to calculate what students' rankings would have been if all Year 7 students who started high school with them had completed Year 12 and were eligible for an ATAR. Refer to *The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank in NSW – A Technical Report* for more details.

Answering some more of your questions about the ATAR

What do these changes mean for Year 12 students?

For all practical purposes these changes will have no effect. Marks will be scaled exactly the same way as before so the rank order of students will be the same.

Any changes in ATARs compared to UAIs will be compensated for by equivalent changes in course cut-offs. The same students will receive entry to the same university courses under the ATAR as they would have under the UAI.

I am teaching Year 12 students, what should I tell them?

Assure them that the changes will not affect their chance of being offered a place in their preferred course, and advise them to ignore the ATAR and work hard. This is no different from the message teachers have always given their students.

What do these changes mean for Year 10 and Year 11 students?

For all practical purposes nothing. The changes will not affect their choice of courses. Students should choose courses according to their abilities, their interests and what will be useful for their future careers.

Where can I find information about how the ATAR is calculated?

Information about how the ATAR is calculated can be found on UAC's website in *All about your ATAR* and *The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank in NSW – A Technical Report*.

Can ATARs be compared with UAIs from past years?

Yes. There is a full conversion table on UAC's website and a summarised version will be included in the *UAC 2010 Guide*.

Contacting UAC

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