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Universities Admission Index 2006

Overview

- In 2006 a total of 50 744 students were eligible to receive a UAI, a decrease of 717 over the corresponding number in 2005 (51 461). This is due to a change in the UAI eligibility rules in 2006 meaning less students were eligible for a UAI in 2006.
- The HSC marks in some courses were higher in 2006 than in previous years so some students may find that their UAIs are lower than they expect.
- In 2006, 16.3% of students received a UAI above 90.00, 32.0% above 80.00, 46.8% above 70.00, and 60.2% above 60.00. These figures are slightly higher to the corresponding figures in 2005 because of the change to UAI eligibility rules in 2006.
- Of the 21 students who received UAIs of 100, 11 are male and 10 female. They come from a mix of government and non-government schools, and have studied a wide range of courses.
- For more information about UAIs students are advised to read the 'You and Your UAI' booklet sent to all 2006 NSW HSC students earlier this month.

HSC versus UAI

HSC marks and a UAI rank are two very different, but complementary, pieces of information, and are used for different purposes.

A student's Higher School Certificate Record of Achievement presents a profile of their achievement in the courses they have completed, both academic and vocational. Their achievement is reported in terms of the standards they have reached in the courses they have completed.

On the other hand, a student's UAI is a number indicating their overall academic achievement, not against a standard, but against other students. The UAI allows the comparison of students who have completed different combinations of HSC courses.

A student's Record of Achievement and their UAI are used for different purposes. The former shows their strengths and weaknesses across the courses they have studied, the latter shows only their overall position in relation to other students. As such, it is used by universities as one way, but not the only way, of selecting entrants for their courses.

The issue at the heart of most criticisms of the UAI is whether a rank based on academic achievement alone is an adequate means of selecting school leavers for university.

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Research shows that academic achievement depends on motivation, perceived value of the task and the effort expended as well as ability. These personal attributes, which are important for university success, are captured by an achievement measure such as the HSC rather than by a test of ability. A recent meta-analysis shows clearly that an achievement measure based on the last year of schooling, such as the UAI, is the best single predictor of subsequent success at tertiary study.

It has often been argued that the UAI is a blunt instrument and that different indices should be used for different courses. Despite the apparent attractiveness of this view there is little empirical evidence to support it. A possible reason for these findings may be the choice available to students, whereby students with the same UAI may have completed very different sets of courses. If the choice of a university course, with all other factors being equal, is determined by a student's knowledge, interests and skills, it is likely that applicants for a particular course will have their UAIs based on HSC courses that provide the academic background required for that course. Students with UAIs based on different patterns of HSC courses are likely to apply for different university programs.

A UAI will obviously have greatest predictive validity when there is congruence between the outcomes a student achieves and the knowledge and skills required of the chosen university course. Consequently, students need to be advised to choose HSC courses that provide a suitable background for their proposed university study.

Advising students in terms of what courses are likely to result in a high UAI while ignoring the nature of the courses they wish to study leads to a trivialising of education. If students choose courses in which they are interested and which will provide a suitable background for their future career, they are likely to work harder. The ultimate result is that they are more likely to succeed.

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