

Universities Admissions Centre (UAC)

SUBMISSION

Regarding the scope of Labor's Inquiry into
post-secondary education

April 2018



Universities Admissions Centre

About us

The Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) Pty Ltd (UAC) was established in 1995 and is the largest tertiary admissions centre in Australia. Owned by universities in NSW and the ACT, our mission is to provide excellence in admissions services and promote equity of access to tertiary education. Central to that mission is a strong culture of servicing the needs of all our stakeholders, in particular our institutions and applicants.

UAC has a trusted and valued position in the higher education sector. Applicants, in particular Year 12 students, turn to UAC for unbiased and authoritative information about university admissions and courses and for an easy interface with which to apply. Institutions rely upon UAC services to handle the bulk of the admissions process, allowing them to focus on their core capabilities of learning and teaching, research and community engagement. Parents, schools, the media and the general public know UAC as their first point of reference for university admissions in NSW and the ACT.

UAC is a member of the Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres (ACTAC), the group that facilitates communication and co-operation between tertiary admissions centres in Australia and New Zealand. UAC's Managing Director is the current Chair of ACTAC.



UAC's submission

UAC welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the scope and terms of reference of Labor's Inquiry into post-secondary education.

UAC is proud to be the bridge between secondary education and higher education for students in NSW and the ACT.

As a not-for-profit working in the broad interests of the education sector, UAC is well-placed to provide objective advice to government.

UAC considers the following areas as important to cover in any thorough-going inquiry into post-secondary education.

1. Status of vocational education

UAC believes it is important for the Inquiry to consider perceptions around vocational/TAFE education and whether school students and the community perceive it as a legitimate and valuable post-secondary destination. In our experience engaging with high school students, too many of them see university as the only worthwhile study option after school, even those who would be better off in vocational education. This is having negative flow-on effects for those students and the Australian economy with unpaid HECS debt and unmet demand in particular areas of employment. While UAC strongly believes in the value of university education, and exists to support access to that education, we also believe in the importance of a robust vocational system, so that the entire tertiary sector is working effectively to add value to students and the community, with recognised pathways and appropriate recognition of prior learning between vocational and higher education.

2. Commonwealth course funding arrangements

The Inquiry should include a consideration of extending Commonwealth support to areas of vocational education not currently receiving that support. There may be perverse incentives existing in the current system whereby students choose higher education on cost rather than suitability to their aptitudes and future career goals.

3. National Unique Student Identifier

UAC believes that the establishment of a national Unique Student Identifier that covers all stages of education will promote the concept of lifelong learning and streamline data capture to enable improved analytics for all stakeholders.

4. Career advice

Labor's Inquiry should conduct an analysis of the role of careers advisers in secondary education. UAC's view is that all secondary students need to have access to professional careers advice in schools in order that they be able to make informed decisions about their post-school destinations. Unfortunately there are many schools where there is either no dedicated career resource, or it is only provided part-time and often by someone without professional accreditation. Good decision-making by students is vital not only to the future plans of those students, but will also minimise unnecessary HELP debt and waste of education resources.

5. Admissions transparency implementation

It would be timely for the Inquiry to conduct a review of the implementation plan for Improving the transparency of higher education admissions. The higher education sector, Australian Government, UAC and other admissions centres have been working together since 2016 to improve the transparency of admissions and it is now necessary for feedback to be sought from end-users on the merits of the implementation and whether the measures taken have indeed helped prospective students and their advisers to better navigate a path to entry into higher education. UAC is also well-placed to provide feedback given the extensive work we do with students, schools and parents. The goal of increasing national consistency in higher education admissions information is a worthy one, but Government and the sector need to ensure that any changes that are made meet the needs of those they are intended to help.

6. Scholarships and income support

A review of government scholarship arrangements and other forms of income support for students is urgently required. UAC is very involved in promoting equity of access to tertiary education and we process over 30,000 applications each year for our equity programs. When we talk to students, particularly those from regional areas and low socio-economic backgrounds, we find that one of the things they are most concerned about is financial support during their studies. These students do not lack aspiration or goals, they lack the money to turn those aspirations into reality.

7. Attrition

While other bodies have been tasked with reviewing higher education attrition rates, it is important for this Inquiry to also consider the scope and nature of attrition and ways of reducing the amount of attrition. UAC has strong capabilities in data management and analysis. In addition, we are developing machine learning applications that could be useful in minimising attrition by helping students choose courses and helping universities select students and provide targeted support to those at risk of dropping out. Even with these improved selection mechanisms, it would also be worth considering whether the current timing of the census date is too early for effective student decision-making.

8. 'Baby Bonus' effect

The increase in Australia's birth rate as a result of the Costello Baby Bonus will be felt in the post-secondary education sector from 2021 onwards. This must be considered by the Inquiry given the large increase to the school-leaver cohort.

9. Impact of micro-credentialling

The growth of MOOCs and micro-credentialling should be explored during the Inquiry, and what impact these will have on graduates of the future. UAC is interested in the development of advanced systems that can handle document and credential verification, having recently released ATARs on the blockchain to over 70,000 NSW HSC students.

UAC thanks Labor for the opportunity to provide feedback on the scope of the Inquiry into post-secondary education, and looks forward to continued work with Government and the education sector in whatever capacity those stakeholders determine to deliver greater success in tertiary education.