



UAC



THE REVIEW OF SENIOR SECONDARY PATHWAYS INTO WORK, FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Response to Discussion Paper

December 2019

ABOUT UAC

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 support lifelong learning and promote equity of access to education. Central to that mission is a strong culture of service to students and the community.

UAC has a trusted and valued position in the education sector. Applicants, especially Year 12 students, turn to UAC for authoritative information and advice about the ATAR, unbiased information about university admissions and courses and for an easy interface with which to apply. Institutions rely upon UAC services that allow them to focus on their core capabilities of learning and teaching, research and student and community engagement. Parents, schools, the media and the public know UAC as their first point of reference for university admissions.

Relevant to this Review, UAC is a member of the Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres (ACTAC), the World-Wide Web Consortium (W3C), the Groningen Declaration Network (GDN) and the Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council (PESC).

OUR SUBMISSION

UAC welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Discussion Paper on the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training.

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

Our mission is to provide equity of access to education, and we too share the Review's interest in increasing student mobility and providing better support and advice to students navigating the options available to them after school.

While the ATAR remains a key component of the work we do in enabling students to access university, we are increasingly focused on supporting other ways in which students can be considered and through which students have control over their individual lifelong learning portfolios. Our recent work demonstrates our commitment to a more rounded and nuanced student profile that considers more than ATAR.

Solutions for the future need to be centred around students and providing them with a streamlined experience as they navigate all varieties of education, employment and training.

Our specific areas of interest as highlighted in the following submission are in Year 12 skills and success and supporting students to make better decisions about post-school pathways.

1. POST-SCHOOL SKILLS AND SUCCESS

Students leaving school need to have sufficient mastery of content, especially in the foundation subjects of English and Mathematics, a range of soft skills, and the academic ability or potential to allow them to transition successfully to further study and/or employment.

The ATAR is a very useful measure of academic achievement at the end of Year 12. It is transparent, fair, consistent and efficient. It also provides a measure of the level of mastery of content that has been achieved by a student.

However, there is no doubt that success at the end of Year 12 is not bound up entirely in the ATAR, and UAC and universities are keenly aware of the benefits, limitations and unintended consequences of the ATAR, and the fact that certain groups may be disadvantaged by the current arrangements.

Increasingly, the entry into university is through the consideration of three streams:



Academic



Opportunity



Skills

The **academic stream** is already well-catered for with the ATAR for Year 12 students and rigorous schedules for the conversion of other qualifications into selection ranks for non-Year 12 students. This includes secondary and tertiary qualifications from education systems worldwide.

The **opportunity** stream is considered through a rigorous system of consideration of educational disadvantage and in 27 separate categories and school recommendations of students whose Year 12 results may not reflect their true potential for university success. The disadvantages considered include among others financial hardship, personal illness and disability, family disruption, disadvantaged schooling, and excessive caring responsibilities.

New and exciting work is now happening around **skills**. There is widespread agreement of the need to consider other aspects of students, especially in the context of the future of work, but these have traditionally been seen as difficult to measure and assess in a rigorous and equitable way.

UAC is currently working with DeakinCo to adopt a TEQSA-approved framework that measures skills including:

- problem solving
- communication
- digital literacy
- leadership
- critical thinking
- teamwork
- innovation

at the foundational/Certificate III level right through to Level 9/Masters.

The methodology involves:

- gathering evidence (through documentation both within and outside school),
- a written reflective testimony, and
- a video testimony.

Adding this rigour to the assessment of skills is a game changer and will allow not only universities but other providers and employers the ability to consider the whole student in a comprehensive, transparent and equitable way.

2. SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO MAKE BETTER DECISIONS ABOUT POST-SCHOOL PATHWAYS

In terms of university admissions, UAC has recently developed tools for Year 10 and 12 students that use machine learning techniques to allow better decisions about the choice of Year 12 and university courses.

This has significant benefits for the student, universities and government.

For Year 10 students, Subject Compass helps them lay a strong foundation for their future plans by choosing the Year 12 subjects right for them:

<https://www.uac.edu.au/future-applicants/subject-compass>

For Year 12 students, Course Compass helps them tap into the experiences of over 100,000 recent applicants by highlighting the paths taken by students with similar educational profiles and attainments:

<https://www.uac.edu.au/future-applicants/course-compass>

Universities have a duty of care to admit students who have a likely chance of success. Students do not want to be burdened by a HECS-debt without the accompanying payoff of graduation and improved employment outcomes. Government is keenly interested in reducing attrition in the interests of the community and in reducing unpaid HECS-debt.

In addition, we have developed a credit management system that again uses machine learning techniques to enable the automation of decisions around credit and recognition of prior learning (RPL). This potentially has enormous benefit not only to education institutions, but also to students looking to move seamlessly from secondary education into higher education, vocational education and back again. Students can package and stack credentials (including micro credentials) easily and truly emerge as lifelong learners.

5. DIGITAL CREDENTIALS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Closely aligned with the credit management system is our work on a credentials platform.

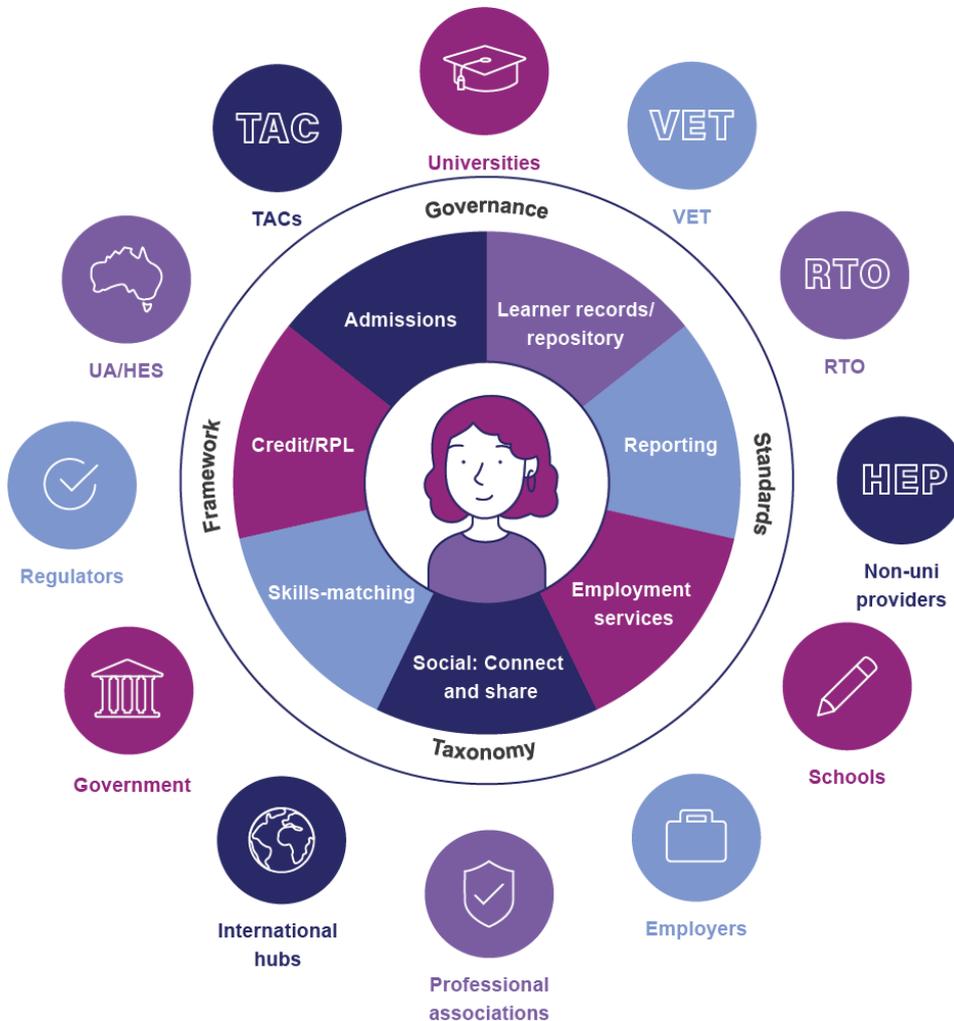
This is about more than just entry to university. It is about individuals holding and controlling **all** their credentials in one secure place, with the easy sharing and verification of those credentials.

Our vision is for a globally connected credentials platform that supports a learner-centric ecosystem and advances lifelong learning.

The platform will:

- empower individuals to take control of, and have permanent access to, all their digital credentials
- provide a seamless, secure and efficient interface for the exchange of verifiable credentials between learners, education providers and employers
- accommodate micro-credentials and the recognition of non-formal learning
- be underpinned by an agreed qualification standards and taxonomy framework

- enable a unified and transparent credential ecosystem that serves the interests of learners, the education sector, government and the workforce community.



The proposed platform has many benefits, particularly those related to credential integrity and portability and cross-sector collaboration (ie education, employment and government).

For the learner –

- permanent access to, and control of, all digital credentials (eg macro, micro, accreditations, recognition of prior learning, skills)
- embedded quality and value indicators for each credential leading to broader and more equitable recognition within and outside the sector
- greater utility/portability of credentials leading to opportunities to proactively identify and address skill-gaps, more efficiently retrain, and benefit from streamlined services such as admission, credit, skills assessment, recruitment and employment.

For the sector/providers –

- unified approach underpinned by common standards allowing for greater efficiency, automation of services (eg admission, credit) and embedded trust
- access to richer data on market needs informing curriculum design and allowing for more bespoke offerings
- better understanding of skills and training gaps on the part of learners driving stronger demand for skills-based and other learning.

For government –

- integrity of the education system, with transparency and automated reporting at every step of the credentialing process
- positioning of Australia as a global leader in engaging citizens in lifelong learning.

For the workforce community –

- greater trust in, and understanding of, the value of digital credentials leading to better informed recruitment decisions
- access to a richer talent pool as learners continuously develop and upskill
- scope for broader engagement/collaboration with the education sector to supplement on-the-job learning with relevant short-form credentials.

Factors that are critical to the achievement of the overall objective of engaging citizens in lifelong learning in a digital economy include:

- broad stakeholder engagement in the vision and design of the broader ecosystem (learners, education providers across all levels, workforce community, government)
- representative governance and feedback to the stakeholder constituents
- clear milestones and timely decision-making
- the capture of learnings and insights from other countries (eg American Workforce Policy Board, Europass, credit bank initiatives in Korea and China).

The credentials platform has clear overlap with the Review's interest in better decisions about all post-school pathways as the process of matching individuals to appropriate courses/training/employment becomes much easier and more effective with a digital credentials portfolio.

We are pleased to announce that an important milestone will be reached in December 2020, when we will be issuing every NSW HSC student with a digital wallet that includes their ATAR.

UAC thanks the Expert Panel for the opportunity to provide this response to the Discussion Paper on the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways and looks forward to continued work with Government, the education sector and the broader community to deliver greater access to education, employment, training and other post-school pathways for all young Australians.