

## Higher Education Standards Panel

### Advisory Committee on Admissions Transparency

#### Terms of Reference

The HESP Advisory Committee on Admissions Transparency (HACAT) will be established for the period 1 December 2021 to 31 December 2022 to support the Higher Education Standards Panel (the Panel) to undertake work requested by the Minister for Education and Youth to:

1. extend the [sector-agreed 2017 admissions transparency common terminology definitions and information set specifications](#) to include information on admission requirements for postgraduate courses and information targeted to international students interested in seeking admission to Australian courses;
2. ensure the inclusion within student ATAR data profiles of all recent higher education students, regardless of whether ATAR was a factor in the student's admission
3. review the common terminology definitions and information set specifications agreed in 2017 to assess whether other aspects of these should be refined or otherwise amended; and
4. work with relevant stakeholders to ensure sector ownership of and buy-in to any proposed updates to terminology and data specifications

The Panel's intention is that any new definitions or information specifications should be implemented in time to support prospective students applying to study in Semester 1 2023.

In addition to guiding the presentation of admissions information in institution and tertiary admission centre websites and publications, the admissions transparency information set specifications are also the basis for the information presented in the Course Seeker national admissions information platform.

The HACAT will also support the Panel's broader advisory role by undertaking work to:

5. analyse changes in the landscape of admissions processes that have arisen since the Panel's 2016 report *Improving the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions*, particularly in light of the sector's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and assess the impact of these changes.

The HACAT has authority to create working groups on particular topics to support its work and to determine their membership.

The HACAT will provide an interim report and recommendations to the Panel on changes to common terminology definitions and information set specification by 31 May 2022. A final report in relation to the full terms of reference is to be provided by 31 October 2022.

Any extension of the HACAT beyond the end of 2022 must be determined by the Panel, taking account of progress achieved and the specific terms of reference required for the extension period.

#### Authority

The Higher Education Standards Framework Threshold Standards set out the expected quality and outcomes for admission processes but do not specify the actual mechanics of higher education

admissions. The Panel has a broad role to advise the Minister for Education and Youth on any matters relating to the Higher Education Standards Framework, including admissions and other aspects of the management of students and information that are covered by the standards. The initial work on admissions transparency and 2017 Joint Higher Education Sector and Australian Government Implementation Plan stemmed from the Panel's 2016 report *Improving the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions*.

In a letter to Panel members in June 2021, the Minister for Education and Youth, the Hon Alan Tudge MP, asked the Panel to review the sector's progress on improving the transparency of higher education admissions, including a specific focus on the issues outlined above.

Under S168(3) of the TEQSA Act, the Panel may, by writing, establish advisory committees to assist it in performing its functions.

## Membership

(NB: appointed in their personal capacity rather than representational)

1. Professor Kerri-Lee Krause, Deputy Chair, Higher Education Standards Panel and Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Avondale University (Chair)
2. Professor Arshad Omari, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Edith Cowan University
3. Ms Connie Merlino, Academic Registrar RMIT University
4. Ms Catriona Jackson, Chief Executive Officer Universities Australia
5. Professor Kathryn von Treuer, Chief Executive Officer Cairnmillar Institute
6. Ms Natalie Simmons, Chief Executive Officer ICHM
7. Professor Martin Westwell, Chief Executive South Australian Certificate of Education Board
8. Mr Stuart Mossman, Chair Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres (ACTAC), Chief Executive Officer of the South Australian Tertiary Admission Centre (SATAC)
9. Ms Sarah Bux, Student at La Trobe University
10. Mr Alistair Maclean, Chief Executive Officer Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

## Background

Improving admissions transparency in higher education has been a focus for the Panel over several years. Its 2016 report found there had been a proliferation of application pathways and admission processes over time, with significant inconsistencies in the expression of admission requirements. In 2017 the Minister appointed a sector-led joint higher education sector and Australian Government [implementation working group](#) to develop a practical response to the report's recommendations. The joint sector and government [Admissions Transparency Implementation Plan](#), released in July 2017, sets out six objectives and timeframes for implementation, to which key higher education stakeholders agreed:

1. Consistent presentation of admissions information
2. Adoption of common admissions terminology
3. Revised ATAR-related thresholds and definitions
4. Tertiary admission centres (TACs) to adopt more consistent approaches and reporting and streamline interstate application processes
5. TEQSA monitoring and guidance on improved admissions transparency
6. A new national admissions information platform.

In 2019-20 TEQSA reviewed implementation of admissions transparency reforms, finding inconsistent and incomplete execution of the recommendations and the implementation plan across the sector.

The Panel recommended to the Minister that further work be undertaken to:

- extend the admissions transparency information sets specifications to encompass postgraduate courses and information targeted to international student applicants
- ensure the inclusion in student ATAR data profiles of all recent higher education students, regardless of whether ATAR was a factor in the student's admission
- work with stakeholders to ensure sector ownership of any updates to data specifications.

Admissions practices have also evolved as providers respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a variety of strategies emerging that may have broader policy implications over the longer term, for which there is currently a paucity of data.

### **Provisional timeline**

October 2021:

- Department to contact proposed HACAT members on behalf of Professor Krause.
- Establish HACAT. To meet once before last Panel meeting of 2021 (18 November TBC).

December 2021-February 2022:

- HACAT to draft recommended updates to common terminology and information set specifications for stakeholder consultation

February 2022:

- Panel to consider draft consultation paper updating common terminology and data sets at its first meeting of 2022.
- HACAT to draft paper discussing emerging admission practices.

March-April 2022:

- 6-week consultation period, including call for submissions and targeted stakeholder meetings.
- HACAT work with stakeholders to build agreement on adoption of updated admissions transparency specifications
- Finalise discussion paper on emerging admission practices and data collection options for consideration at second Panel meeting for 2022.

May-October 2022

- HACAT to continue build consensus among stakeholders on adoption of updated admissions transparency specifications and consider impact of any sector feedback.
- Develop analysis and report on emerging admission practices

31 May 2022

- HACAT to report to the Panel on the outcomes of common terminology and information set specifications by 31 May 2022.

31 October 2022

- HACAT to report to the Panel on emerging admission practices by 31 October 2022.