Dear Briony

Re: Yearly variation in National IB Conversion Table

IB have asked why the conversion table used by ACTAC members, with the exception of SATAC and the University of Tasmania, varies from year to year. This document is a brief explanation of the reasons for the variation.

ACTAC calculates the National table each year, using contributions from NSW, South Australia and Victoria. Contributions from both NSW and Victoria are calculated each year, using the latest information available. South Australia’s contribution is recalculated approximately every five years. Queensland is expected to provide an additional contribution when there is a sufficient history of IB results in that State for valid analysis to be performed.

Variations in NSW and Victorian inputs

Each year the NSW and Victorian contributions to the Combined Table are calculated using a common test equating method to establish the relationship between IB scores and Notional ATARs. In NSW, the common test is the School Certificate Examination. In Victoria, it is the General Achievement Test.

Common test equating is based on the premise that students with similar results in the common test will reach similar standards of achievement at the end of Year 12, whether in the IB or in the relevant state certificate. Each year there will be some variation in the relationship because of slight differences in the distributions of marks in the underlying examinations.

Published data show the variation in the relationship between the aggregate marks upon which the ATAR is based in each state. The shape of the distribution changes slightly from year to year. A similar variation is seen in published data on IB results. The percentages of graduates on each IB score change from year to year.
Each year, in both NSW and Victoria, the cohort analysed comprises those students who graduated in the most recent three year period. Using data collected over three years means that the contributions to the Combined Table are essentially rolling averages. This reduces the variation in the contributions. However, it is inevitable that some variation remains.

To conclude, the NSW and Victorian contributions to the Combined Table are each calculated annually and vary slightly from year to year for the reasons given above. Likewise, the ATAR is calculated afresh each year and the relationships between aggregate marks in each state and the ATAR vary for the same reasons.

IB scores vary in the same way that the NSW and Victorian aggregates vary from year to year. As the distribution of aggregated marks varies, a given HSC aggregate or VCE aggregate will not necessarily equate to the same rank from one year to the next.

HSC students in NSW don't see the aggregates, so they don't notice the variation. VCE students in Victoria do see their aggregates and ATARs, but it does not appear to be an issue.

Yours sincerely

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