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of **UAC**

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UAC  
Universities Admissions Centre



# Foreword

UAC is proud to be celebrating more than 50 years as a trusted partner to the education sector.

From its foundations as an administrative clearing house for three metropolitan universities, UAC has evolved to become an integral provider of admission solutions, assessment expertise and services supporting lifelong learning, and an impartial adviser to prospective students, institutions, and governments.

The story of UAC in these pages unfolds as one of adaptability, innovation and resilience.

The influence of government policy and social trends makes the higher education sector a dynamic one and UAC too has navigated these ebbs and flows.

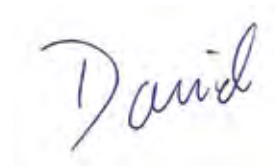
Since our inception we have used technological innovation to improve the quality and efficiency of our services. From the early days processing student data on an IBM 360 to today's artificial intelligence we have always embraced new ways of doing things.

Our goals have always been to be of value to institutions and to make the transition to higher education seamless for students. We care about learning, and we value the role we play in helping people access it.

Our longevity could not have been achieved without the dedication of UAC's people, and this 50-year landmark reflects their commitment and the 'can-do' attitude that is the hallmark of UAC.

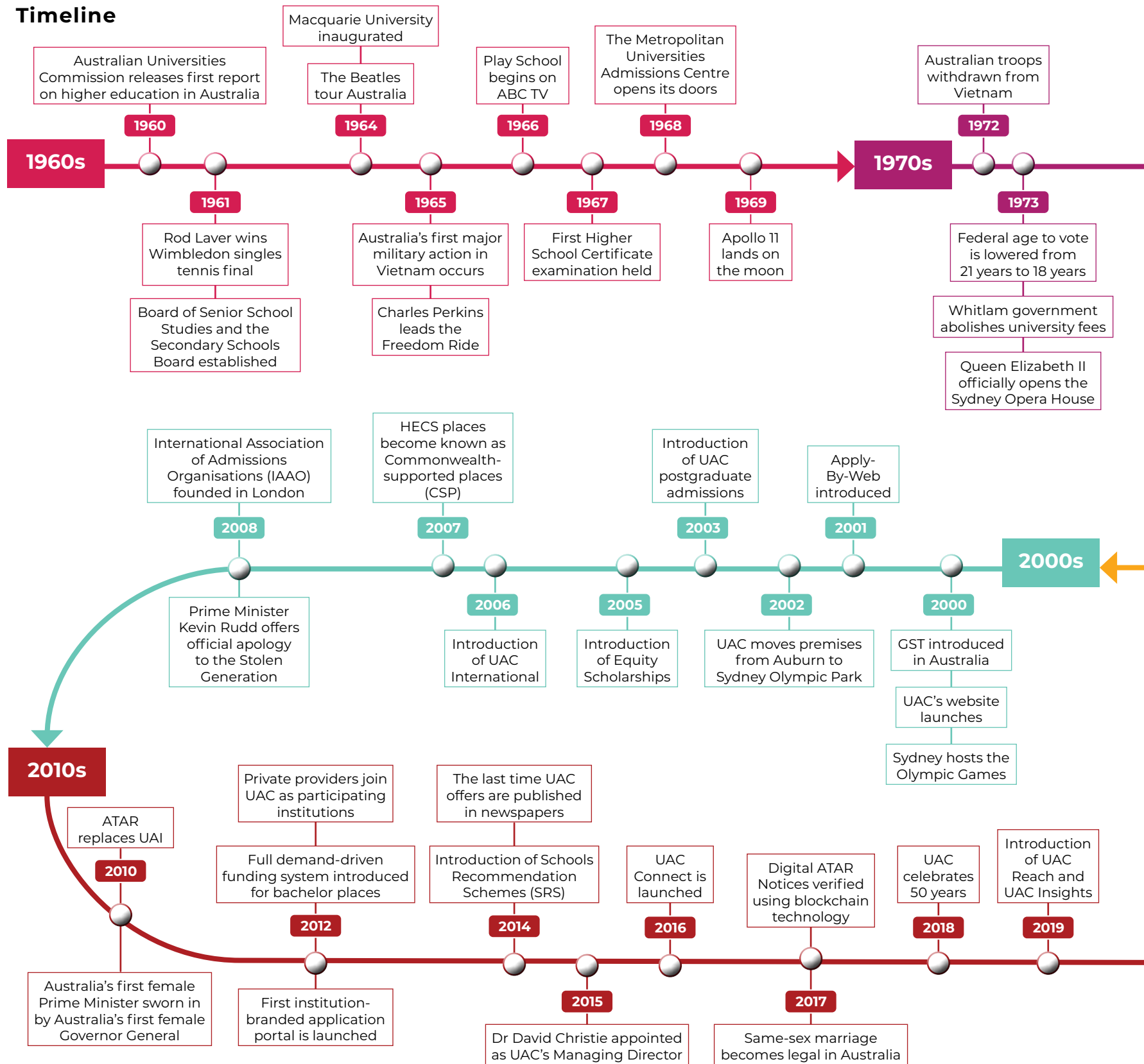
We thank our partner institutions for their trust in us and all those who have contributed to our journey so far.

As a new chapter begins for UAC, we look forward to another 50 years in the service of all those who care about lifelong learning.

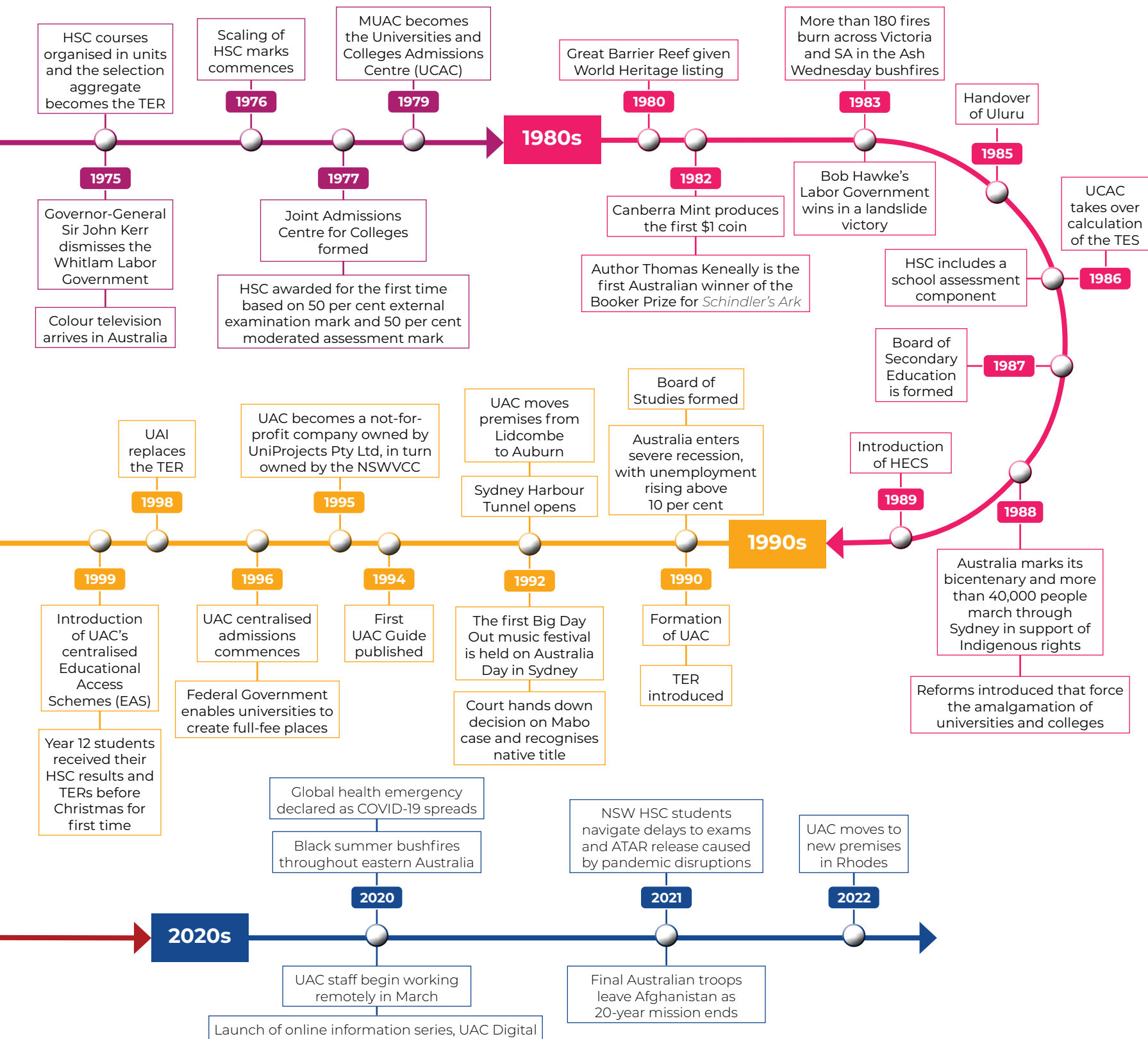
A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr David Christie  
Managing Director

# Timeline

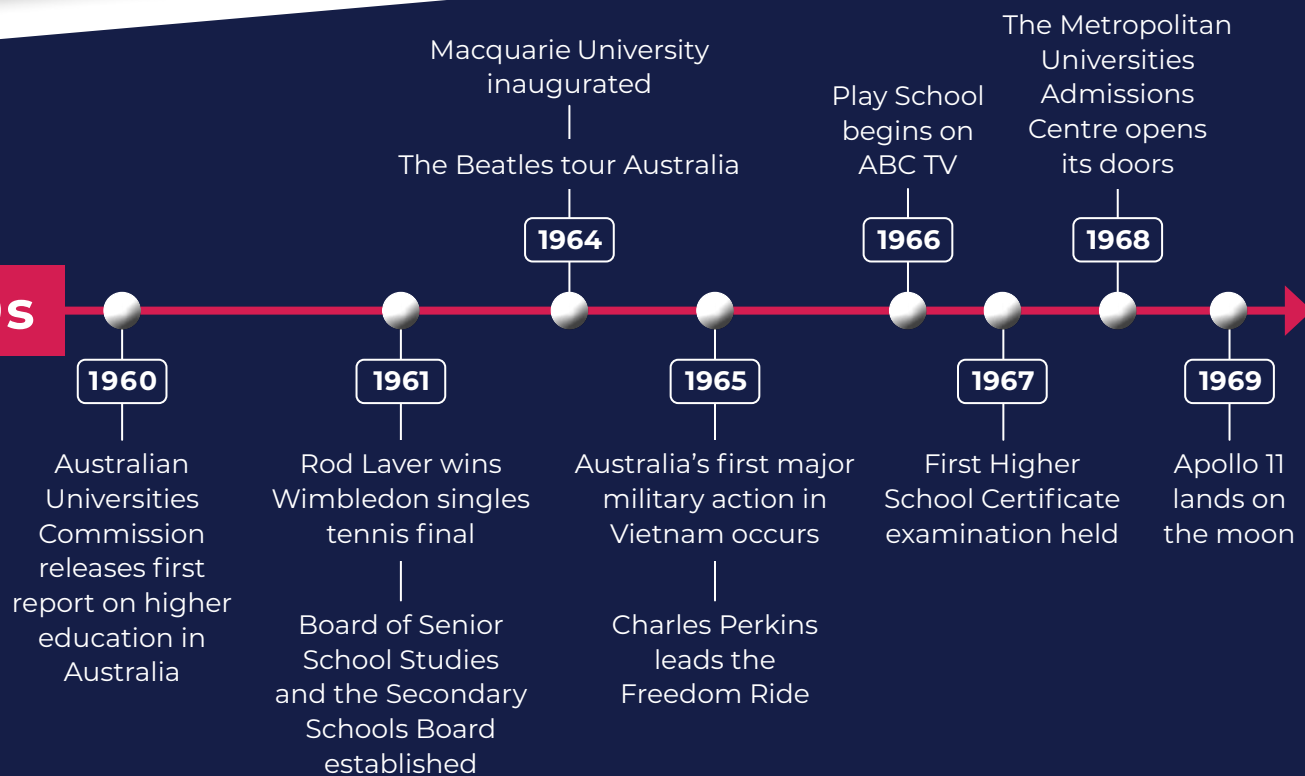








## 1960s





# Chapter 1

## FIRM FOUNDATIONS – THE 1960s

Formal tertiary education in Australia began with the founding of the University of Sydney in 1850. And from this time until the late 1950s and 1960s, there was little to no control or influence applied by governments.

But the 1960s, in particular, was a decade of transformation on many fronts. The post-war baby boom and higher levels of migration had led to a process of 'youthification'. Industry, commerce and government also expanded and Australians enjoyed increased prosperity.

Like other advanced nations, Australia experienced unprecedented demand for tertiary study as attitudes towards the value of education beyond secondary schooling began to change. At this time, matriculation to university was open to all students who passed the exams and could afford the fees.

But this rising demand for tertiary study placed enormous pressure on the sector and led to the introduction of course quotas.

Aspiring students submitted applications to multiple universities to increase their chances of obtaining a place. To streamline the handling of applications and improve the predictability of enrolments, the three Sydney metropolitan universities – the University of Sydney, the University of NSW and Macquarie University – formed a joint admissions office, the Metropolitan Universities Admissions Centre. The organisation we now know as UAC was born.

### MENZIES AND THE MURRAY REPORT



Prime Minister Robert Menzies

In 1956, Prime Minister Robert Menzies commissioned a committee, headed by Sir Keith Murray, to examine the needs and future of Australian universities.

This review was the first national and wide-ranging investigation of Australian university education.

The committee released its report, the Murray Report, in November 1957. It found that universities lacked sufficient funding to accommodate the growth in students: 'Their position was critical and might become catastrophic.'

Although the states had primary responsibility for universities, Menzies introduced the principle of substantial permanent assistance from the Commonwealth to state universities.

#### Australian Universities Commission

Menzies set up the Australian Universities Commission to act as an intermediary between universities and the state and federal governments.

In its first report in 1960, the Commission found that if 'the enrolment demand is to be met in terms of the existing university pattern, the Australian community must set up every two years the equivalent of at least one new university of 8,000 students'.

The Commission recommended the provision of more than £93 million – double the previous year's funding – to universities over the next three years.

As the funding flowed, an unprecedented campus building boom commenced. Extensive building works at the University of Sydney included the Fisher Library and Carslaw Building and a 35-acre Darlington campus extension.

The University of NSW built mechanical and electrical engineering schools, three new residential colleges and sporting facilities.

Regionally, the University of NSW proceeded with a northern campus to be known as the Newcastle University College, and the University of New England expanded its colleges and completed a new agricultural economics building.

Despite the expansion of existing universities, the additional students could not be absorbed. In October 1963, the Commission recommended that, over the next three years, the Menzies Government spend another £81 million and offer the states an additional £60 million.

A new metropolitan university was announced and £1.1 million was allocated for planning site works and construction at North Ryde. Macquarie University, Sydney's third university, was inaugurated in 1964 and construction of the campus began in 1966.



Fisher Library Stack under construction, University of Sydney



Macquarie University under construction



# The 1960s



Students in Fisher Library  
University of Sydney, 1950

## Quota restraint

From the outset, Menzies had believed that 'it may not be practicable for Australian governments to meet all the needs for university education in

Australia, and at the same time achieve the best use of our resources in the national interest'. The Commission, however, felt that the 'very blunt instrument' of a quota for admission to universities was not an acceptable principle and that the public image of universities would suffer if they denied entrance to qualified students.

Conscious of their limited capacity, the universities changed their own policies. The University of Sydney introduced a quota of 365 students for first-year medicine in 1962. The University of NSW felt that 'the magnitude of the long-term problem is such as to demand a radically new approach to tertiary education' and, in 1963, it also adopted a quota system.

These decisions fundamentally changed how applicants were admitted to university. It was no longer sufficient to meet matriculation standards set by the institution; applicants had to compete for a place.

Apart from the controversy surrounding its principles, the quota system created new problems for the universities and prospective students. Anxious applicants lodged multiple applications to the three metropolitan institutions in the hope of securing a place at one. The universities subsequently struggled to predict how many offers of enrolment they would need to make to fill available places. In some cases, several offer rounds were required.

## CONSIDERATION OF A CLEARING HOUSE

The idea for a clearing house to deal with university applicants first emerged in 1963, when the NSW Department of Education mooted it for applications to the University of NSW. It did not gain traction.

The Deputy Registrar of the University of Sydney, Hugh McCredie, took up the cause in 1967, writing to University of NSW Registrar, Godfrey Macauley, to float the idea of 'more cooperation in regard to selection of students for entry into the university'. McCredie had sourced information from his southern counterparts. The Victorian universities had set up the Victorian Universities Admissions Committee in 1967 with a joint admission form and a common selection procedure for Melbourne University, Monash University and La Trobe University.

This time the idea was embraced more enthusiastically.

According to John Gannon, Deputy Registrar of the University of NSW, a joint admissions office 'would have considerable advantages for potential students and their parents'.

Arthur Ford, Registrar at Macquarie University, cautioned that they would 'only get a satisfactory joint arrangement if we could achieve consistency in the approach which each university is prepared to adopt'. His Assistant Registrar, Alan Findlay, known as Bill, agreed: 'Although not absolutely essential it would be most advantageous if all universities had a common basis for selection.'

More research was needed.

In the 1968 selection period, data was collated on: the number of students who applied to more than one university; the number of qualified students seeking entry to university who were denied a place; and the number of students who were prepared to go to another university if they were not offered a place in the university of their choice.

The universities had estimated there would be around 12,000 applicants that year for the 9,000 available places at all institutions. The data showed that the University of Sydney received 7,200 applications, the University of NSW received 7,000 applications and Macquarie University received 5,000 applications. Therefore, 19,200 applications had been lodged and about 7,000 of these were duplicated.

These numbers confirmed that cooperation among the institutions would be beneficial. A sub-committee with two representatives from each institution was formed to investigate the establishment of some form of joint selection for 1969. The sub-committee presented its report to the vice-chancellors in July 1968.

### PROPOSAL FOR A JOINT ADMISSIONS OFFICE

The sub-committee's key proposal was the creation of a joint admissions office, staffed and operated by the three universities, which would later be called the Metropolitan Universities Admissions Centre, the first iteration of the organisation we now know as UAC. This new office would eliminate the duplication of work caused by students lodging multiple applications and enable the universities to forecast more accurately the number of offers needed to fill available places.

The agreed process was that applicants would complete one application form, which was designed to provide information for selection into any of the three universities. Applicants would then receive an offer of a place for the first possible faculty or course in their list of preferences.

Applications would be dealt with in two categories:

- ❖ (A) Higher School Certificate (HSC) or Leaving Certificate candidates (who had not previously attended a university)
- ❖ (B) all others.

For category A applicants, the joint admissions office would enter on the application the HSC or Leaving Certificate results, determine whether an applicant had matriculated for the university for which they had shown a preference and, if necessary, whether or not they had met the required faculty or course prerequisites.

For category B applicants, the application form and documents would be photocopied and sent to the relevant universities for a decision.

At an agreed date in January, the joint admissions office would produce the first round of offers for press release and individual notification.

The sub-committee recommended that the full system be introduced in 1970 with a partial system introduced for only category A applicants in 1969.

A provisional budget of \$24,500 was set, with costs to be shared equally among the participating institutions.

In August 1968 the three vice-chancellors approved the proposal and planning for the Metropolitan Universities Admissions Centre (MUAC) began in earnest.



# The 1960s

## METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITIES ADMISSIONS CENTRE

### Preparations

Staffed and financed by the three universities, MUAC would be operated by a sub-committee of the three registrars. JM Gannon, Deputy Registrar of the University of NSW, was appointed chair. A management committee, consisting of two staff from each university, would meet monthly and give an annual report to the registrars. The first meeting was held on 24 October 1968.

The University of Sydney was delegated management of accounting and staffing (and it continued this function up until the 1990s) and Macquarie University was to provide computing functions.

Any major policy matters, such as changing closing dates for applications, were to be referred to the three registrars who, in turn, could refer the matter to their vice-chancellors.

William Hamilton, seconded from the University of Sydney, was appointed to act as secretary to the committee and the officer-in-charge.

Premises were found on the first floor of the Crystal Palace Arcade at 590 George Street, Sydney, and a one-year lease was signed.

Furniture was supplied by the universities, including examination-type tables and chairs for the public area. Three punching machines and two verifying machines were borrowed from the universities and a photocopier was hired. An eight-line rotary switchboard was installed with five incoming lines.

The institutions pooled their information into a joint booklet called the *Students' Information Guide* which included an application form. The 50,000 copies were distributed to all NSW high schools with HSC candidates

and anyone who requested an application form.

At the second meeting of the MUAC Committee on Tuesday 5 November 1968, approval was given to employ 15 temporary clerks and to hire a cash register.

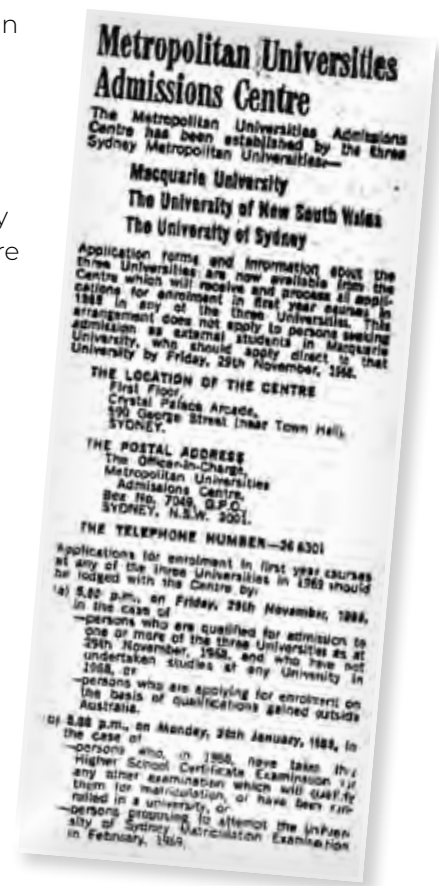
### Launch

A press release announcing the launch of the new admissions system was prepared and delivered to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Australian*, Australian United Press for regional newspapers and the Australian Broadcasting Commission (television and radio). Students were advised to wait for their results before lodging their MUAC application.

Application forms were available from MUAC or the university enrolment offices.

An advertisement was also created – 2 columns wide and 6 inches long – and placed in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Australian* for Friday 1 November.

On Friday 1 November 1968, the day the United States stopped its bombing in Vietnam and talks of peace began, the Metropolitan Universities Admissions Centre opened its doors.



### Operations

Technology has been integral to UAC operations since its inception.

MUAC's data processing was completed for category A applicants by the University of NSW's 360 model 25 computer, which prepared HSC cards. The selection process was carried out on the University of Sydney's System 360 model 20 computer.

Students' qualifications were ranked according to the aggregate marks obtained in their best five matriculation subjects in the 1968 NSW HSC. If their matriculation exam took place before 1968, their aggregate was re-scaled to correspond to an equivalent 1968 HSC aggregate.

Applicants were given up to 12 faculty or course preferences. Each applicant was considered in turn to determine whether there was a vacancy in the quota for the faculty or course listed as the first preference. If a place was not available, the second preference was considered, and so on, until either a place was allocated in a quota or all preferences listed were exhausted. This process accounted for 76 per cent of applications.

The remaining 24 per cent of applications – not based on the HSC – were considered individually, with each university undertaking its own assessment of the merit of the qualifications. The decisions of each university were then conveyed to MUAC and a single offer of a place was made for the highest preference for which the applicant had been selected.

The first round of offers was posted on 28 January 1969 and a list of successful applicants was published in the press the next day. A small second round of offers was made on 7 February to fill any remaining vacancies.

### Full steam ahead

In February 1970, MUAC released its First Year Report. The experiment had been a success.

MUAC had received 14,537 applications (8,041 of these from current NSW HSC students) and made 10,842 offers.

According to the report, 77 per cent of successful students were offered the faculty or course of their first preference and 94 per cent of successful preferences were in the first eight.

MUAC also reported that 1,869 matriculated applicants were not offered a place (including 762 who completed the 1968 NSW HSC) and that a large proportion of these had sought to enrol in arts, commerce, economics and law courses. It determined that a number of these unsuccessful applicants had gone on to enrol at another university in NSW or the ACT, a teachers' college or the NSW Institute of Business Studies and Technology, and therefore were not disadvantaged by the new system.

The First Year Report found that the three participating universities were satisfied that the joint admissions office 'was an improvement, particularly from the applicant's point of view, on the procedures available in previous years' and agreed to operate the centre again in 1970.

It was recommended that three permanent staff be appointed – namely an officer-in-charge, a secretary to the officer-in-charge and a clerk/typist-switchboard operator – although the system of using seconded staff from the universities from December to February would continue.

MA Smith was appointed officer-in-charge, MUAC's first dedicated, full-time staff member. He was 'responsible to the committee for organisation and planning of selection procedures and day-to-day administration of the Centre; dissemination of information about university entry requirements to schools (by visits, if necessary) and to the public in general; production of a joint information booklet; and staff training'.

A review of operations brought forward the closing date for category B applicants to October to allow more time to verify their qualifications and reduced the number of preferences from 12 to 8, as most successful applicants were accommodated within 8 preferences and it would make administration of offers easier.

A late fee of \$5 for applications received after the October closing date was suggested, in addition to the existing \$5 late fee for applications received after the January closing date.

Finally, more suitable office premises were found at Wentworth Avenue, near Liverpool Street.

## LURE OF LEARNING

## INCREASE IN DOCTORS' FEES LIKELY

By the Medical Roundman

Doctors' fees in N.S.W. are likely to rise later this year.

In general, specialists and an increasing number of general practitioners have noted increased earnings from last year up to July, 1960.

The British Medical Association, Sydney Branch, today stated that a general increase in fees is expected.

Dr. Dainton said: "It has become quite obvious that while the medical profession is likely to increase its earnings, the Government is likely to restrict its expenditure."

"It appears that there will be a need to make some adjustments in fees in order to meet these increased costs."

**July 1**

"It is unlikely that the medical profession will start to increase its fees until after the 1st of July."

Dr. Dainton said that many of the general practitioners who were involved in the strike last year had been successful in their demands for a 10 per cent increase in fees.

He said the following conditions of the strike were: 1. A 10 per cent increase in fees for all services. 2. A 10 per cent increase in fees for all services. 3. A 10 per cent increase in fees for all services.

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## STUDENTS APPLYING TO enter university at the Metropolitan Universities' Admission Centre, Sydney, N.S.W. and Macquarie University have set up a joint centre on the 1st floor, Crystal Palace Arcade, 500 George Street. They say the centre will avoid much of the confusion surrounding university enrolment last year. SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS, STONEY UME ARTS RESULTS, P. 24.

## AUST. ARMY TURNS DOWN U.S. TANK

(CANBERRA, Thurs.—The Australian Army has declined to accept the American-designed M48 Patton tank.

The Minister for Defence, Mr. Arthur Calwell, today said the Army had turned down the offer of the tank because it was not suitable for the Australian climate.

Mr. Calwell said the Army had been offered the tank by the United States Government as part of a military aid package. The tank is a main battle tank and is the most advanced tank in the world.

Mr. Calwell said the Army had been offered the tank because it was the most advanced tank in the world. The tank is a main battle tank and is the most advanced tank in the world.

## Fighting

Mr. Litch said the Army was continuing its operations in the area of the border with the United States. The Army had been fighting for several days and had been successful in driving the enemy back.

Mr. Litch said the Army had been fighting for several days and had been successful in driving the enemy back. The Army had been fighting for several days and had been successful in driving the enemy back.

## TEST KITS AS CHILD DANGER

Police warned yesterday that test kits for children could be dangerous. The kits are used to test for lead in paint and are sold in many hardware stores.

Police said the kits were dangerous because they could be used to test for lead in paint. The kits are used to test for lead in paint and are sold in many hardware stores.

## NG politician warns of war danger

CANBERRA, Thurs. — Civil war could erupt in Papua-New Guinea if Afro-Asian demands for early independence were met, a leading Papuan politician said today.

The politician, Mr. P. J. S. O'Neill, said that the demands for early independence were a threat to the stability of the region. He said that the demands were a threat to the stability of the region.

## HUNDREDS OF REAL BARGAINS

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## UAC's key players

### **MUAC**

When UAC was founded as the Metropolitan Universities Admissions Centre (MUAC) on 1 November 1968, it was managed by an Administrative Committee consisting of two members of staff from each participating university. The committee was responsible to the registrars of the universities.

#### **MUAC Administrative Committee 1968**

- ❖ **JM Gannon (Chair)**, Deputy Registrar, University of NSW
- ❖ **JP Hill**, Officer-in-Charge Admissions, University of NSW
- ❖ **P Westlake**, Assistant Registrar, University of Sydney

- ❖ **JD Laing**, Assistant Registrar, University of Sydney
- ❖ **AW Findlay**, Assistant Registrar, Macquarie University
- ❖ **PH Farley**, Administrative Officer, Macquarie University

The committee secretary was WG Hamilton.

### **UCAC**

On 1 April 1979, MUAC became the Universities and Colleges Admissions Centre (UCAC). UCAC was overseen by a Management Committee, consisting of two people from each of the three universities, and three people nominated by the participating colleges.

#### **UCAC Management Committee 1979**

- ❖ **P Westlake (Chair)**, University of Sydney
- ❖ **CB Edye**, University of Sydney
- ❖ **AW Findlay**, Macquarie University
- ❖ **RC Taylor**, Macquarie University
- ❖ **J Fitzgerald**, University of NSW
- ❖ **J Hill**, University of NSW
- ❖ **DJ Kelso**, Riverina College of Advanced Education
- ❖ **J McLauchlan**, NSW Institute of Technology
- ❖ **JA Rodgers**, Cumberland College of Health Sciences



## UAC

In 1990, amalgamations of colleges and universities led to UCAC becoming the Universities and Colleges Admissions Centre (UAC). The management committee reformed and comprised of one member from each of the participating institutions, plus the executive officer.

## UAC Pty Ltd

In 1995 UAC became a not-for-profit company owned by UniProjects Pty Ltd, in turn owned by the NSW Vice-Chancellors Committee. With that change the overseeing committee became the UAC Board. A Users Committee was also established with institution representatives to provide advice on operational matters.

### UAC Board members 1995

- ❖ **Prof RD Guthrie (Chair)**, University of Technology, Sydney
- ❖ **T Cavanagh**, University of New England
- ❖ **S Chapman**, University of Sydney
- ❖ **Prof G Cooney**, Macquarie University
- ❖ **R Kendall**, Chair Users Committee
- ❖ **A Stanton**, UAC Managing Director
- ❖ **J Pegg**, Company Secretary

## Officer in charge to Managing Director

Initially UAC was headed by an Officer-in-Charge who oversaw the everyday business of the Centre. As UAC's structure evolved, this role became that of Managing Director.

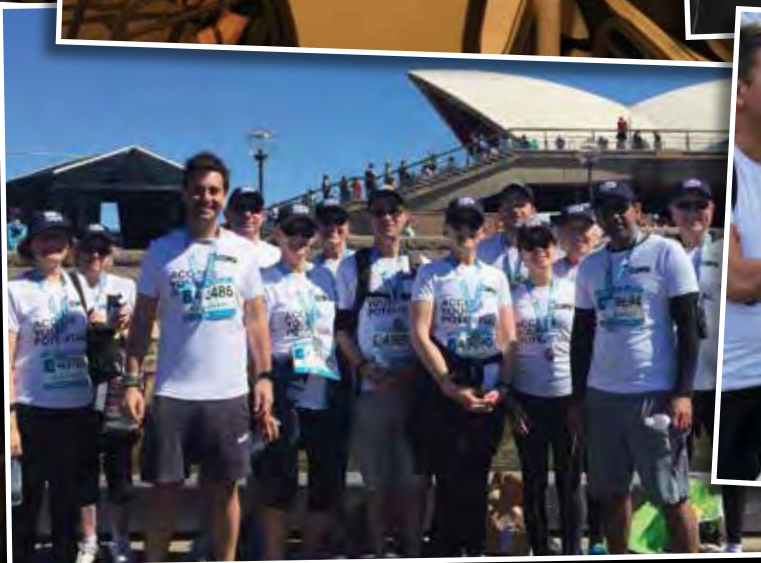
This post has been held by:

- ❖ **MWG Hamilton**, Officer-in-Charge
- ❖ **MA Smith**, Senior Administration Officer, (secondment), Division of the Registrar
- ❖ **Ian McDonald**, Executive Offer
- ❖ **William (Bill) Burrridge**, Executive Officer/ Officer in Charge
- ❖ **Graham Mayne**, Executive Officer
- ❖ **Peter McCloskey**, Executive Officer, Director
- ❖ **Andrew Stanton**, Managing Director
- ❖ **Dr David Christie**, Managing Director

# Case study









## 1970s

Australian troops  
withdrawn from  
Vietnam

1972

Federal age to vote  
is lowered from  
21 years to 18 years

Whitlam government  
abolishes university fees

Queen Elizabeth II  
officially opens the  
Sydney Opera House

1973

HSC courses  
organised in units  
and the selection  
aggregate becomes  
the TER

1975

Governor-General  
Sir John Kerr dismisses  
the Whitlam Labor  
Government

Colour television  
arrives in Australia

Scaling of  
HSC marks  
commences

1976

Joint Admissions  
Centre for Colleges  
formed

HSC awarded for the first  
time based on 50 per cent  
external examination mark  
and 50 per cent moderated  
assessment mark

1977

MUAC becomes  
the Universities  
and Colleges  
Admissions  
Centre (UCAC)

1979



# Chapter 2

## GROWTH AND AMALGAMATION – THE 1970s

Tertiary education was booming in the 1970s and applications for tertiary study were skyrocketing. The quota system, however, was causing concern. Thousands of qualified students were missing out on places and, as a result, there was much public discontent over the management of universities.

Capturing the public's mood, on its election in 1972 the Whitlam government abolished fees for tertiary education. It also gave the Commonwealth full control over university funding and introduced a system of student income support.

As the 1970s progressed, the higher education sector expanded with alternative tertiary education providers, such as colleges of advanced education, and the demands on public funds increased.

Attention began to turn to ways of continuing this expansion while reducing costs and the idea of broadening MUAC's members was a popular political suggestion. However, it was not well

received by regional institutions or MUAC itself. Instead, the separate Joint Admissions Centre for Colleges was formed.

Still, there was significant pressure from the state government for a combined admissions centre. It became increasingly difficult for MUAC to argue against the proposal and it proffered the solution of a joint centre with a management committee led by its founding universities.

The solution was accepted and in 1979 the Universities and Colleges Admissions Centre (UCAC) formally commenced operations.

### WHITLAM'S TIME: FEE-FREE UNIVERSITIES

The expansion of higher education in Australia in the 1970s was given a boost not only by continued economic growth but by the idea that it would promote more equal educational opportunities.

Amid this backdrop came the 1972 federal election. Federal Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam campaigned on a policy of broadening access to higher education by abolishing fees: 'We believe that a student's merit, rather than a parent's wealth, should decide who should benefit from the community's vast financial commitment to tertiary education.'

On its election, the Whitlam government removed fees for tertiary education, introduced a system of student income support and gave the Commonwealth full control over university funding.

This policy would remain in place for the next 14 years.

### THE RISE OF COLLEGES AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

In the 1960s a new, alternative type of tertiary education provider had emerged in NSW. Colleges of advanced education (CAEs), which offered diplomas and degrees, grew out of existing institutes of technology and senior technical colleges and diversified into broader areas, including teacher training colleges. The first to open its doors – in 1964 – was the NSW Institute of Technology (now University of Technology Sydney).

By the mid-1970s there were 30 higher education providers – either universities or CAEs – in NSW.

Many CAEs had courses similar to those at universities and awarded degrees that were readily accepted in industry and commerce.

While these colleges had no research focus and did not incur high set-up costs, one of the main challenges they faced was their running expenses. With an average student cohort of only 1,410, their return on investment was not as healthy as the universities. As the higher education sector expanded and made increasing demands on public funds, attention began to turn to ways of continuing expansion while reducing costs.



UTS tower in 1977, shortly after completion

### QUOTA CONCERNS

As applications for study continued to grow, the quota system was causing unease. By 1970, all three metropolitan universities were limiting the number of first-year students they would enrol.

In 1971, MUAC received 17,000 applications for 12,000 places. Thousands of qualified applicants missed out on a place.

On the eve of the publication of MUAC offers in 1973, the NSW Opposition Leader, Patrick Hills, labelled the situation a 'tragic abandonment of youth'. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that members of all political parties had met a stream of constituents whose children had missed out on an offer.

# The 1970s

## MUAC EXTENDS

The Whitlam government's no-fee policy led to a record 29,000 MUAC applications in 1976. More applicants meant more time required for processing applications. To alleviate the heavy workload in January, the closing date for Category A candidates was moved forward from mid-January to 1 October 1975. Applicants would, however, be able to change their course preferences until 16 January 1976 via a new form sent with computer-printed acknowledgements in mid-December.

An added benefit of the earlier closing date was that it encouraged students to think about their preferences for university education before the publication of their exam results. If they chose them while they were still at school, they would be able to seek advice from counsellors and careers advisers.

### New staff and premises

With the growth in applications, the administration requirements at MUAC also grew and more staff were appointed. Bill Burridge was hired as MUAC's officer-in-charge in August 1972 (replacing MA Smith) and in 1974 John Miller was employed as 'understudy' to Burridge.

MUAC was also growing out of its Wentworth Avenue premises, which were described in the 1974 MUAC Committee Sixth Report as 'barely suitable to accommodate a large number of people in summer', with difficult access for both deliveries and visitors and frequent lift failures. By 1975 it had relocated to 29 Bellevue Street, Surry Hills.

### Reaching out

As the 1970s progressed, MUAC became an established feature of the higher education landscape. In 1978, the applicant pool was expanded to include ACT non-Year 12 applicants.



MUAC's *Students' Information Guide* was a valuable source of information for prospective applicants and careers advisers. In 1977, 75,000 copies were printed, with 38,000 distributed at the end of July to high schools across NSW. It was also given to technical colleges, evening colleges and private colleges with HSC candidates.

As part of the Guide distribution, MUAC agreed to include, for a fee, application material for other universities.

The question soon became one of further expansion, when the NSW Institute of Technology requested to join MUAC. But there were broader talks about extending MUAC beyond the higher education sector and the request was put on hold.



### INEVITABLE EXPANSION



Students on Library Lawn,  
University of NSW, late 1960s

While the establishment of MUAC had helped to simplify the application process for entry into the three metropolitan universities, students still needed to submit a separate application for regional universities and another for CAEs. It was often argued that some rationalisation was required, and that NSW could follow the precedent set by the Victorian Universities Admissions Centre, which had recently been extended to include nine Melbourne metropolitan CAEs.

In 1975, a study was undertaken on the feasibility and desirability of a joint admissions centre for universities and CAEs in NSW and the ACT. The study found that more than half the people seeking entry to a university or college applied to more than one institution: 'Many intending students lodge "insurance" applications whose only purpose was to keep all options open . . . Almost five applicants were being offered places in universities and colleges for every one that actually enrolled.'

To address these issues, it was recommended that a joint admissions centre be established. The idea, however, was not well received.

The University of Newcastle, the University of New England and some colleges opposed the scheme because they had their own recruitment teams. The main opposition, however, came from MUAC universities. The Registrar of the University of NSW, Colin Plowman, argued that the 'system we are presently using is very smooth, efficient and economical', while the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University, Professor WM O'Neill, observed that a joint system for all colleges and universities would produce 'a very clumsy piece of machinery'.

In a letter to the Federal Minister for Education, Macquarie University Vice-Chancellor Edwin Webb explained the difficulties and disadvantages of the proposal, including the bureaucratic and impersonal nature of such a system, and the additional expenses that would be incurred. However, he did support the establishment of a separate centre for other institutions that could work closely with MUAC.

### Joint Admissions Centre for Colleges

The Joint Admissions Centre for Colleges (JACC) was formed in June 1977. Located in offices in North Sydney, it accepted applications for 20 colleges.

By its first closing date of 1 October 1977, JACC had received 23,500 applications.

Based on MUAC's successful centralised admissions model, the JACC acted as a clearing house for college applications. Applicants submitted one application with up to eight courses preferences. The applications were sent to each relevant college for assessment and the college made offers directly to the applicant. This meant that applicants could receive multiple offers.



# The 1970s

MUAC worked closely with JACC, aligning closing dates for applications and offers. Its chair, Peter McCloskey, would become a significant contributor to UAC.

There were now three admission systems operating in NSW: MUAC, JACC, and the non-metropolitan universities. Many NSW institutions, and all ACT institutions, however, were still out on their own.

## Amalgamation pressure

Despite the success of the JACC, there continued to be significant political pressure to implement a combined admissions centre. The NSW Government insisted that the arrangement would result in real advantages for students and wanted the successful MUAC model extended to include universities outside Sydney and other government-supported tertiary institutions.

The idea wasn't new. Back in 1971, NSW Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and Science, Charles Cutler, had written to Macquarie University Vice-Chancellor AG Mitchell explaining that a state-wide system would allow the gathering of data 'to give coordinated advice of enrolment trends that would assist the government in effective long-term planning of facilities for higher education'.

The JACC expressed support for such a system but many institutions resisted, particularly the regional institutions who felt that their cooperative efforts outside MUAC gave them advantages.

Arthur Ford, Registrar at Macquarie University, explained to a meeting of the registrars in 1977 that the country universities felt that 'the ability to make offers early gives them the prospect that some students will have an offer well ahead of the offers made through MUAC and will have time to reflect on whether they really wish to undertake study in one of the country universities and to have made all the necessary adjustments which a decision of this kind necessitates'.



Students on campus, University of NSW, early 1970s

He supposed that they may also have been concerned that where an applicant's preferences are limited, the regional universities would be low on the list of many students.

Eventually, MUAC's hand was forced. Macquarie University Deputy Registrar, Alan Findlay, explained in a report to the registrars in 1978: 'The State Minister for Education and the Chairman of the Higher Education Board have both made clear statements that their ultimate objective is for there to be one centre to process applications for admission to all tertiary institutions in NSW. It will become increasingly difficult politically to argue against this objective as combined centres are now successfully operating in Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia.'

The proposal was initially that MUAC would provide a service to other institutions based on its system. The MUAC Management Committee recommended acting now in case the JACC system developed in a way incompatible with the MUAC system, making it difficult for the two to merge as time went on.

MUAC would maintain the upper hand, with the Management Committee continuing to operate as it was (two members for each of the three metropolitan universities) and, depending on the number of institutions joining, additional members added (one member to represent other universities and three members to represent CAEs). In October 1978, the first major change to MUAC's structure in a decade was announced: the three founding institutions would be joined by 18 colleges and institutes.

### Universities and Colleges Admissions Centre

Preparations for the joint admissions centre were extensive. Liaison officers at each participating institution were appointed and an education and training program implemented.

The MUAC Management Committee reported that a 'major task was to document the Centre's procedures, to communicate these to the staff in participating institutions and to assist the institutions that had joined the Centre to understand the Centre's procedures'.

On 1 April 1979, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Centre (UCAC) formally commenced operations. For the first time, university and college applications in NSW were processed together.

Philip Westlake, chair of the UCAC Management Committee and Associate Registrar of the University Sydney, explained the rationale for the joint office in a 1979 *Sydney Morning Herald* article:

'Previously students could have had quite a few more than eight preferences on various application forms. They might have put in 30 preferences, but there's no way they can enrol in 30 courses. They had to get it down to one at some stage.

Under the new system, it's like being cruel to be kind, as it were, because the student has to make up his mind earlier.

The sooner the student faces these things the better it will be for the student concerned and the institutions. But we certainly don't underestimate the difficulty of the task facing students in trying to sort out the different requirements of all the courses available, and we hope that the work the centre is doing will help students in this.

Hopefully, we won't be making as many wasteful offers. In some courses, we were sending out the offers at the rate of two for one, knowing that only half the offers were going to be accepted.'

# The 1970s



Students on campus,  
University of NSW, c1970s



Trudy Noller with students from  
Cronulla High School - 2018



Dr David Christie and  
Georgia Holloway - 2022



Wendy Fisher and  
Donna Munro - 2016

## Engaging the community

As an organisation working behind the scenes on behalf of institutions, MUAC was focused on its core mission of managing applications. Requests to present information on application and selection procedures to groups of interested parties were politely refused.

By the late 1970s, however, as student numbers grew, the value of promoting MUAC's processes was recognised. During these years, the officer-in-charge attended meetings and events, mostly on the invitation of organisers. In 1979, these events included a Careers Advisers Association Conference at the Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education and a Tertiary Orientation Programme organised by ACT colleges.

By the late 1990s, UAC's Customer Service team was well established but primarily focused on its contact centre activities. Community engagement was done on an ad-hoc basis, with visits to a handful of schools every year if invited.

By the end of the 2000s a more proactive approach was needed. UAC's first Community Engagement Manager, Donna Munro, was hired in 2009 with a brief to engage on a much larger scale with careers advisers and schools.

UAC's current Community Engagement Manager, **Trudy Noller**, worked closely with Donna to build the event schedule and remembers its humble beginnings:

***'It was the HSC and Careers Expo, at Randwick Racecourse. We had a very tiny stand, about 2 metres by 1 metre, with a couple of boxes of UAC Guides and some colourful posters about equity schemes.'***



The program quickly grew. From 2010, the team was on the road for the first time, attending regional careers expos, and meeting with career advisers and schools in sometimes far-flung locations across the state.

Donna Munro recalls:

*'While being on the road was sometimes difficult and demanding, some great friendships were formed, and a strong sense of camaraderie and community developed.'*

An annual calendar of events was established. Trudy observes:

*'We really wanted to continue building the engagement side as we could see that it was not only performing an invaluable service to schools, students, universities and the community more broadly, but it was also contributing to the growth of the UAC brand and a positive image and reputation for UAC.'*

The Community Engagement team now has four staff members and attends close to 350 events each year.

In 2021, the team launched the next stage of its development, UAC Digital, an online platform that hosts webinars and information sessions for students, careers advisers and parents.

Always at the core of the team's work is its mission: to help students navigate their path to higher education and present UAC as friendly, helpful and a trusted source of advice and information.

# Case study











## 1980s

Great Barrier Reef given World Heritage listing

1980

1982

Canberra Mint produces the first \$1 coin

Author Thomas Keneally is the first Australian winner of the Booker Prize for *Schindler's Ark*

More than 180 fires burn across Victoria and SA in the Ash Wednesday bushfires

Bob Hawke's Labor Government wins in a landslide victory

1983

UCAC takes over calculation of the TES  
HSC includes a school assessment component

1985

Handover of Uluru

1986

Board of Secondary Education is formed

Australia marks its bicentenary and more than 40,000 people march through Sydney in support of Indigenous rights

1988

Reforms introduced that force the amalgamation of universities and colleges

Introduction of HECS

1989



# Chapter 3

## REVOLUTION AND REINVENTION – THE 1980s

The 1980s saw the higher education sector dramatically restructured. Enrolments continued to flourish but funding the growth in graduate numbers presented challenges, especially during a period of economic recession.

The Hawke government's solutions were controversial: a graduate tax, HECS, was introduced; funding arrangements were designed to encourage institutions to amalgamate; and new non-government income streams were encouraged, including full fees for international students.

The decade was also one of transformation for NSW schools, with the move towards a more flexible and diverse curriculum. An assessment component was introduced for the Higher School Certificate, but the biggest controversy surrounded the calculation of a selection aggregate. The NSW Department of Education no longer saw this as its responsibility

The NSW Government pushed universities to broaden their admission procedures beyond the scaled aggregate. After considering other options, many complied, but a small group felt that scaling was fair and equitable and, with some changes to scaling procedures, two admission methods operated.

UAC played a leading role in coordinating this new system for its universities and the Technical Committee on Scaling was established.

All universities eventually agreed to use a scaled aggregate, the Tertiary Entrance Rank.

As institutions restructured due to funding changes, UCAC also restructured and ended the decade as the streamlined Universities Admissions Centre: UAC.

### HAWKE'S ECONOMIC GOALS

The Hawke Labor Government, which had won a landslide victory in March 1983, was keen to encourage expansion of the higher education system to promote greater access and develop the workforce skills base. However, the country was in recession.

Funding cuts were imposed on all higher education institutions.

In 1984, all three Sydney metropolitan universities announced cuts in their intake of first-year undergraduates, and this trend continued for the next few years.

Meanwhile, Year 12 retention rates increased. Uncertainty in the labour market and a policy of improving educational attainment meant more students were staying on at school. A record 40,432 students sat the HSC in 1986.

### TIDAL WAVE OF CHANGE

The Hawke government's commitment to tie universities and colleges to economic goals was evident in the creation of a super ministry of Employment, Education and Training, headed by John Dawkins, in 1987.

In July 1988, Dawkins released a paper setting out the government's strategy for the long-term development of Australia's higher education system and setting the scene for the restructure of the tertiary education sector.

The government would use its funding as a lever for reform and bestow financial rewards on those institutions catering to 'national priority' areas such as engineering, information technology mathematics and economics.

This transformation of the tertiary training landscape was described as one of the biggest overhauls of universities and colleges in the last 20 years.

### The graduate tax

Tertiary enrolments flourished in the 1980s and the sector had more students than ever before. By 1985, there were 357,000 tertiary students and it was predicted that, by 1990, campuses would overflow with a record 455,000 students.

Real government funding of higher education, however, was dropping. While new university places were being created, funds had not risen proportionately. The government needed a solution to achieve the further growth in graduate numbers it believed Australia needed.

A committee on higher education funding was convened and headed by former NSW Premier Neville Wran. It recognised that non-government funding was needed to boost higher education and it recommended that students repay part of the cost of their education through a tax surcharge.

Figures had shown that free education had not favoured low-income earners or increased the number of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. A graduate tax meant that the government would share the cost of tertiary study between society (which benefited from an educated population) and graduates (who benefited professionally and financially from their education).

The plan split the nation. The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee was vocal in its dissent, student protests broke out, and academic unions, the Australian Teachers' Federation and the Australian Chamber of Commerce opposed the scheme.

# The 1980s

Despite the opposition, the graduate tax – or Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) – came into effect on 1 January 1989, ending 15 years of fee-free university study.

To offset the effects of the tax on students from low socio-economic backgrounds, the report recommended a package of equity measures, including the expansion of AUSTUDY.

A single contribution rate was set: \$1,800 for a full-time year of study. The debt was repaid when a student's annual income reached \$22,000.

## A unified national system

In another major reform, the government abolished the binary system of universities and CAEs.

Government funding incentives encouraged institutions to merge and create 'mega-unis' that would improve the quality and variety of courses offered, consolidate targeted research efforts, increase the number of university places and achieve economies of scale in a university-only higher education system.

Two new universities were created. The new University of Western Sydney incorporated the Macarthur Institute of Higher Education. Charles Sturt University was formed from the amalgamation of the Mitchell College of Advanced Education and the Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education.

## New income: international students

In 1984, the number of international secondary and tertiary students in Australia was estimated to be 14,000, up 67 per cent since 1980. These students were subsidised by the Australian Government.

Of the tertiary students, around 40 per cent were enrolled in just two universities: the University of NSW and Monash University. In some courses at



Students protest the introduction of the graduate tax, 1988

the University of NSW, up to 70 per cent of first-year students were from overseas.

In 1983, the Hawke government had set up the Committee of Review of Private Overseas Student Policy, led by Professor John Goldring from Macquarie University, to review the overseas student program.

The Goldring Report, released in June 1984, recommended that subsidised overseas students comprise no more than 5 to 10 per cent of undergraduate enrolments in any tertiary institution and no more than 25 per cent of any one course. It also recommended that fees be set to between 30 and 40 per cent of full tuition costs.

Tertiary institutions could, however, offer additional places, at full cost, in courses specifically tailored for overseas students.

The government had found a way to supplement university income. In 1990, it would introduce full fees for all international students.

### THE GREAT HSC SHAKE UP

On a state level, the decade was one of review for the NSW school system.

School retention rates were also increasing. Uncertainty in the labour market and the Australian Government's policy to encourage young people to stay at school to improve their education, meant more students were staying on.

#### The Swann-McKinnon Report

Published in 1984, the Swann-McKinnon Report was labelled the 'greatest shake-up to the Higher School Certificate system in almost 20 years'.

The report recommended a comprehensive reform of the school system and called for a more flexible and diverse curriculum. School education was to be broad and have 'purpose and value for all students'. Education, it said, 'is not simply a process to select and prepare a minority for universities and tertiary colleges'.

The first major announcement by the NSW Minister for Education, Rodney Cavalier, was that the aggregate system would be abolished 'because it was too complex and because it probably discriminated against many students'. It would be replaced by a simpler HSC.

School assessments would be introduced to give students credit for their progressive efforts over Years 11 and 12. The new HSC notice would have two marks for every subject: one would be the results in the final examination and the other the school's assessment.

No aggregate would be shown.

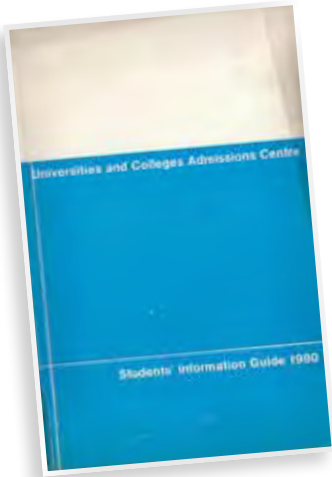
Another recommendation from the review included the establishment of a single board of education, independent of the Department of Education, to provide 'continuity and coordination across the whole range of secondary education'. It would replace the Secondary Schools Board and the Board of Senior School Studies.

In 1987, the Board of Secondary Education (BOSE) was formed.



# The 1980s

## EXPANDED ADMISSIONS



By 1980, its first year in its expanded form, UCAC represented 21 institutions: the three founding metropolitan universities, the NSW Institute of Technology, the Wollongong Institute of Education and 16 colleges. UCAC was now managing admissions for 83 per cent of higher education courses in NSW.

The University of Newcastle and the University of Wollongong continued to operate their own cooperative admission

procedures while the Australian

National University and the University of New England operated independently.

The first issue of the UCAC *Students' Information Guide* described the benefits of the new set up to applicants: 'The establishment of a joint office for processing applications should make your task of selecting a course and applying for admission much simpler than it would be if you were required to apply separately to each institution.'

The general operations of UCAC didn't change in its expanded form. Applications were still lodged by post or in person and applicants could choose up to eight preferences. The closing date for applications was early October and late applications were accepted up to mid-January on the payment of a \$20 fee. HSC students were selected on their best 10 units of matriculation subjects.

UCAC received applications from 78 per

cent of 1979 NSW HSC students and processed 40,483 applications – 22,792 Category A applications and 17,691 Category B applications. A total of 34,206 offers were made to 30,149 applicants. The overall enrolment rate (percentage of enrolments to offers) was 52 per cent.

## AGGREGATE ALTERNATIVES

For UCAC, the most significant outcome of the Swann–McKinnon report on the HSC was its questioning of the need for scaling and aggregation of marks for tertiary admissions.

The view, echoed by the media and general public, was that scaling was 'incomprehensible and unnecessary'. At a time when the competition for a place at university was intense, the newspapers were full of stories of applicants missing out on higher education and venting dissatisfaction with the apparent lack of transparency and consistency in admission score calculations.

### In 1980, admissions for the following institutions were processed through the newly formed UCAC.

Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education

Cumberland College of Health Sciences

Kuring-Gai College of Advanced Education

Mitchell College of Advanced Education

NSW Institute of Technology

Sydney College of the Arts

University of NSW

Armidale College of Advanced Education

Goulburn College of Advanced Education

Macquarie University

Nepean College of Advanced Education

Nursery School Teachers College

Sydney Kindergarten Teachers College

University of Sydney

Catholic College of Education

Hawkesbury Agricultural College

Milperra College of Advanced Education

Newcastle College of Advanced Education

Riverina College of Advanced Education

Sydney Teachers College

Wollongong Institute of Education



The report recommended that universities develop other admission procedures based on HSC marks.

The Department of Education would no longer calculate the Tertiary Entrance Score.

The discontinuation of an overall measure of achievement was generally welcomed by teachers, parents and employers, but not everyone was on board. Tertiary institutions, which relied almost solely on the aggregate mark

for admissions, believed the system was convenient and objective.

A working party of university academics and administrators was established to consider alternative admission procedures, such as HSC results, aptitude and personality tests and interviews, and separate entry examinations. Institutions investigated different models to construct aggregates but the majority view was to continue to use the HSC and some form of aggregate.

The University of Sydney's academic board decided that 'the aggregate system remained the best way to decide which students should be accepted and should continue to be used' and scaling ensured that students had flexibility in their choice of school subjects.

The iterative scaling method had been designed to establish relativity between different subjects so that the marks gained in a supposedly difficult subject, such as 4 Unit Mathematics, could be directly compared with the marks attained in a less demanding subject, such as Mathematics in Society. A further scaling process would then be used to standardise marks between courses. The aggregate used for admission was then calculated from the best 10 units.

The university took the initial responsibility for developing an algorithm similar to the iterative procedure, calculating the Tertiary Entrance Score and supplying the information to UCAC. This method became known as the University of Sydney scaling system, or the scaled aggregate.

### Working with the new HSC

In 1986, the selection aggregate process was complicated, with some institutions using the scaled aggregate and others using an aggregate of HSC marks.

The 1987 *Students' Information Guide* outlined the changes for applicants: 'As a result of changes to the 1986 HSC examination differing selection aggregates will apply to various institutions. You will be considered for admission to a course based on your selection aggregate for the institution offering that course.'

George Cooney (who would serve as chair of the Technical Committee on Scaling from 1989 to 2007) recalls it was a very confusing time. 'For a short time there were several aggregates, with no central authority; each institution was responsible for specifying how their selection aggregate would be calculated, using the HSC marks provided by the Board of Secondary Studies.'

Students received a selection aggregate notice from UCAC showing 23 aggregates, one for each participating institution.

After the difficulties of 1986, in 1987 the University of Sydney sought to establish an advisory technical committee to manage and advise on the scaling process.

UCAC's role extended to calculating aggregates and assessing matriculation eligibility for those institutions that continued to use an aggregate and advising students of their aggregate. The following year the Tertiary Entrance Score would once again be reported on the HSC results.

# The 1980s

## Aggregate aggravation

Unsurprisingly, many students were confused by the often-great discrepancy in their aggregates at different institutions. A groundswell of discontent ensued. According to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 'thousands of students have been bemused by the sometimes radical differences between the total of their marks listed on their certificate and their TES mark'.

In 1988, in an effort to simplify the system and not disadvantage students who chose the more demanding HSC courses, more universities adopted the scaled aggregate.

By 1990, all institutions were using a selection aggregate based on scaled marks, but there were variations in the rules for calculating it. The accepted solution was to convert the aggregate of scaled marks to a percentile rank. Thus, the Tertiary Entrance Score was replaced by the Tertiary Entrance Rank.

## Technical Committee on Scaling

The scaling process was initially owned and controlled by the University of Sydney and it funded the costs associated with it. The Technical Committee on Scaling, formed in 1987, was an advisory committee only.

The question of where the ultimate authority lay was resolved in 1990 when the Technical Committee on Scaling (TCOS) formally became an inter-university committee. TCOS reported to the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee through the Committee of Chairs of Academic Boards and Senates of universities in NSW and the ACT.

With funds from UCAC, TCOS purchased a standalone computer system to perform the scaling operation.

In 2007, the ownership of the scaling algorithm, related implementation programs as well as associated hardware and intellectual property used to calculate the aggregate, would be transferred to UniProjects, UAC's owner.

In the 2020s, TCOS meets once a year and now calculates the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR). There are 10 institution representatives – one from each university – plus a psychometrician from NESAC, the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies Director, the UAC Managing Director, the UAC Data Manager (secretary) and the Chair.

## A STREAMLINED UAC

As UCAC's institutions restructured, so too did UCAC.

With the formation of a university-only tertiary education sector, and the subsequent disappearance of colleges from its list of participating institutions, UCAC removed the word from its name and became the Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) – UAC.

The Management Committee was also reconstituted. It would comprise the executive officer, one member from each of the participating institutions, plus one additional person for each institution making at least 7,000 offers of admission in a year.

There would be no specified term of office for Management Committee members, but sub-committees, such as Accommodation, Editorial, Finance and Staffing, Overseas Admissions, Statistics, and Systems, would continue to appoint members for two years.

As the date of amalgamation for institutions was 1 January 1990, the committee agreed that the same date would be appropriate for the new UAC to be formally constituted.

By the end of this tumultuous decade in higher education, UAC had once again transformed itself.



Helen Tam, UAC's Research Development and Statistics Manager



Sydney Morning Herald cartoon, 11 Feb 2002

## The history of selection aggregates and ranks

The development and use of university selection tools for high school students – culminating in what we now know as the ATAR – has been a big part of the UAC story, but their history goes back even further.

When the University of Sydney was founded in 1850, student admissions were simple: to matriculate, students needed to pass a number of subjects in a formal exam and pay the university fee. While major changes were made to secondary schooling in the twentieth century,

with the establishment of the Leaving Certificate in 1913 and the Higher School Certificate in 1966, matriculation didn't really change.

It wasn't until demand for university study grew, and student quotas were introduced, that passing an exam was no longer enough: applicants had to compete for places. To allow applicants to be compared, the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies began to calculate each student's aggregate based on their best five HSC subjects.

Soon after, it became evident that scaling was necessary to ensure all students were compared fairly, irrespective of the combination of courses taken, and in 1976 the Board of Secondary Studies began scaling HSC marks

From the beginning, scaling was considered a complex and mysterious process. It was strongly criticised by the public as 'incomprehensible and unnecessary'. In response,



in 1984 the NSW government instructed what was now known as the Board of Senior School Studies to implement a new system of calculating an aggregate – without scaling.

Institutions, however, believed the scaled aggregate remained the best way to decide which students should be accepted. The University of Sydney assumed initial responsibility for developing the new algorithm, calculating the Tertiary Entrance Score and then supplying the information to UAC in what became known as the University of Sydney scaling system, or the scaled aggregate.

In 1991, responsibility for scaling was given to an inter-university committee, the Technical Committee on Scaling, which reported to the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee. This arrangement continues to this day.

## The tertiary rank through the years

### **Tertiary Entrance Score**

The Tertiary Entrance Score (TES) was introduced in the 1970s. Based on a student's best 10 HSC units, it had a maximum value of 500. A shake up of the HSC in 1984 led to the aggregate mark being abolished and school assessments replacing school estimates. The responsibility for calculation of the TES was transferred away from the Board of Senior School Studies to institutions, leading to the University of Sydney scaled aggregate.

### **Tertiary Entrance Rank**

In 1990 the TES, using just the aggregate marks, was replaced with the Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) – a rank that used the aggregate marks to determine rounded percentiles on a scale of between 1 and 100 to the nearest 0.05 to indicate a student's position in relation to other Year 12 students.

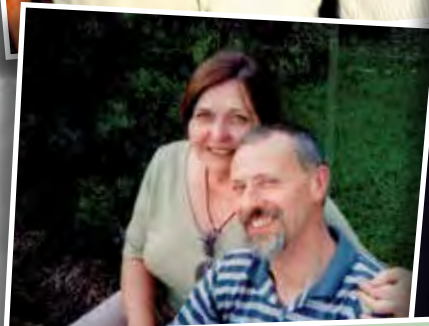
### **Universities Admission Index**

In 1998 all Australian states adopted a common scale for reporting their TERs. In NSW the change was accompanied by a change of name to the Universities Admission Index (UAI). Despite the name change, in most respects the UAI was the same as the TER.

### **Australian Tertiary Admission Rank**

In 2009 the UAI was replaced by the ATAR, a term to be used throughout Australia to reflect the equivalence of ranks between the states (though Queensland continued with its own system until 2020). The maximum rank changed from 100 to 99.95 and the reference cohort changed from Year 10 to Year 7 to maintain interstate comparability.

# Case study









Federal Government enables universities to create full-fee places



UAC centralised admissions commences



UAI replaces the TER

1990s

1990

Board of Studies formed

Formation of UAC

TER introduced

Australia enters severe recession, with unemployment rising above 10 per cent

1992

Sydney Harbour Tunnel opens

UAC moves premises from Lidcombe to Auburn

The first Big Day Out music festival is held on Australia Day in Sydney

Court hands down decision on Mabo case and recognises native title

1994

First UAC Guide published

1995

UAC becomes a not-for-profit company owned by UniProjects Pty Ltd, in turn owned by the NSWVCC

1996

UAC centralised admissions commences

1998

UAI replaces the TER

1999

Introduction of UAC's centralised Educational Access Schemes (EAS)

Year 12 students received their HSC results and TERs before Christmas for first time



# Chapter 4

## INNOVATION AND CENTRALISATION – THE 1990s

The early 1990s provided a clear example of the impact of the health of the economy on university student numbers. In 1992, in the middle of a global recession and with unemployment at its highest level since the Great Depression of the 1930s, demand for tertiary places exceeded supply, and thousands of hopeful students missed out on places. By 1995, with the economy in much better shape, the situation in many instances had reversed: universities were on the search for students.

Inadequate government funding remained an issue. Full fee-paying places for both postgraduate and undergraduate students was one of the solutions; higher student contributions for subsidised courses was another.

In the mid-1990s, UAC invested in the most significant upgrade of its technology infrastructure since its inception. The new Universities Admissions System (UAS), a modified version of the existing QTAC system, allowed UAC to implement centralised assessment and reporting. The logistical challenges of the system

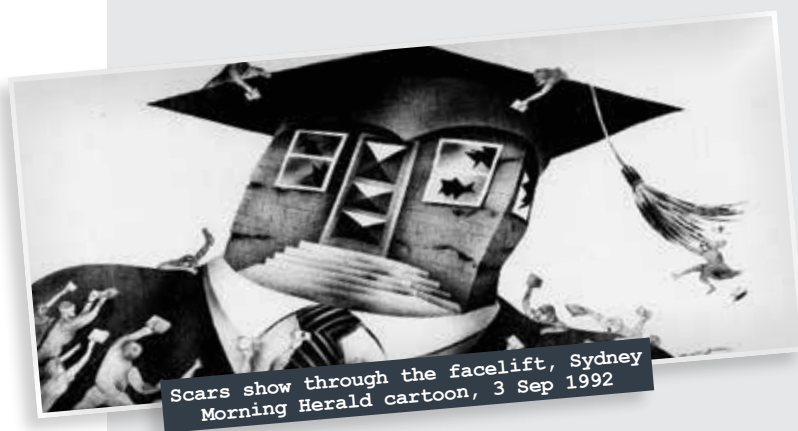
set up were immense but the pay-off was a far more streamlined process for both UAC and institutions. A couple of years later, another exciting technological leap took place when UAC launched its website.

Universities were once again pressured to change the way they selected school leavers, with the Tertiary Entrance Score having gained disproportionate prominence as a measure of success in the HSC. In January 1998, in an effort to regain balance, TERs were removed from HSC results and released separately by UAC. In the same year, all states except Queensland agreed to use a common scale when calculating entrance scores. In NSW, the change in method heralded a change in name: the Universities Admissions Index.

### ECONOMIC MODERNISATION AND DEREGULATION

Students who had optimistically begun the decade as part of Australia's 'new and improved' higher education system were hit by another economic downturn, described by Prime Minister Paul Keating as 'the recession we had to have'.

The recession led to limited employment options, higher retention rates in schools, and peak demand for university places. Stories abounded of crowded lecture theatres, packed tutorials and students having to access facilities late at night. Many institutions over-enrolled students to ensure they reached government quotas.



#### Heightened competition for places

Despite the full lecture theatres, demand for places exceeded supply and, in 1992, 45 per cent of school leaver applicants were left without a place. Speaking to the media, UAC's Executive Officer, Peter McCloskey observed: 'To my mind, there is bad news in a lot of this. We don't like to use words like disastrous but [the situation] is very, very grim.'

In 1993, the situation hadn't improved and the TERs required for entry hit record heights. According to McCloskey, 'it's not entirely satisfactory that thousands of well-qualified students are missing out, where two years ago their marks would have got them in'.

A correction soon took place. The 1993 Federal Budget increased HECS repayment rates and lowered the income threshold for repayments.

The cumulative effect was a drop in school leaver demand for university entrance.

Meanwhile, the situation was changing for postgraduate students, too. In 1994, the Federal Government deregulated postgraduate coursework fees – a major new money-earner for universities. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that universities were becoming 'highly entrepreneurial in opening up a host of fee-paying postgraduate courses to help fill their coffers'.

#### A buyer's market

By 1995 the economy was looking up, demand for higher education was dropping, and universities were actively competing for students.

On 12 January 1995, *The Sydney Morning Herald* ran the headline 'TER-ific news': cut-offs were set to fall and universities were so worried about a slump in demand for many courses that they would accept direct late applications.

UAC institutions made a total of 52,419 offers that year, up by more than 3,000 on 1994, and after the January offer round there were still vacancies at nearly every university.

This was all good news for applicants, with the resulting competition between universities giving students wider study options and a more user-friendly transition to university:

# The 1990s

According to *The Sydney Morning Herald* in September 1995, 'If you are a good student, it is a buyer's market.'

## SAVAGE FUNDING CUTS

In 1996 the Liberal/National Coalition, led by John Howard and Tim Fischer, defeated Paul Keating's Labor Party in a landslide victory. In August of that year, it released the Higher Education Budget Statement. The agenda was clear – it would take \$1 billion out of the higher education system over five years. The Minister for Education, Amanda Vanstone, described it as a 'fresh start for higher education in Australia'. Others described it as 'savage'.

Other major changes included reducing university operating grants by nearly 5 per cent, and overhauling HECS. Student contributions would rise between \$800 and \$3,000 per year, depending on the course or the degree, and graduates would have to start paying HECS instalments once their annual income hit \$20,700 rather than \$28,000.

### The West Review

In early 1997, Amanda Vanstone announced a review of the higher education system that would 'provide universities with a "framework for change" over the next two decades'. She said the review, to be chaired by Roderick West, 'was a key part of the Government's commitment to increase standards in Australian universities and to ensure "the sector is equipped to face the challenges of the future"'.

In April 1998, the West Report recommended the abolition of capped places, fees set by universities, and a universal loan scheme to help students pay tuition costs.

The report also emphasised the need to maintain the interfaces between the higher education and vocational education and training sectors.

### Entrepreneurs required

From 1998, universities would be allowed to offer extra places to local students who had missed out on a publicly funded place, as long as the students paid the full cost of tuition. The number of fee-paying places was initially limited to 25 per cent of the total enrolment of Australian undergraduates in any one course.

In addition, universities could introduce shorter degrees, more vocationally oriented degrees and a wider range of interdisciplinary courses – all for a fee.

The final directive was that any reduction in places could not affect school leavers or research students, meaning postgraduate coursework students would be the hardest hit.

Along with substantial increases in fees, the government would make 4,000 merit-based scholarships available to disadvantaged undergraduate students over the next four years. To be eligible for one of the scholarships, to be distributed by the universities, students needed to belong to an 'equity group', which comprised students from migrant backgrounds, poorer families and isolated areas, and Indigenous students.

This was a new era for universities. They were forced to become even more entrepreneurial and were pitched into fierce competition against one another for tens of millions of dollars a year in private funding, including the money brought in by thousands more fee-paying students.

### TECHNOLOGICAL LEAPS AND BOUNDS

UAC's operations had broadened over the years and attention turned to formalising and restructuring its operations.

Advertisements were drawn up for the position of Director and for the new position of Manager of Information Technology, with Peter McCloskey and Gene Bagdonas duly appointed.

#### A new admissions system – UAS

Central to all change was UAC's technology infrastructure. Up until the mid-1990s, UAC's computing functions operated from a mainframe computer at the University of NSW, but that support was being withdrawn in 1995.

The UAC Computer Systems Steering Committee was established to explore options for the 1996 admissions period. A solution was required that would allow UAC to provide value-added services to its institutions.

Several options were considered: port the existing programs to another computer at another institution; rewrite the UAC system; use admissions software from another tertiary admissions centre. The first two options were expensive and did not offer any improvement in functionality or support for new technologies. The Steering Committee, therefore, considered the computer systems in use at QTAC, SATAC, TISC and VTAC. In mid-1994, the QTAC and TISC systems were shortlisted for further analysis.

UAC's IT Systems Manager, Firaz Osman, was an IT trainee at this time and recalls being on the panel when Peter Kruger, who had developed the QTAC system, came to UAC's Auburn office to demonstrate the capabilities of their system to Acting Director Andrew Stanton, Operations Manager Andrea Goodwin, and Manager of Information Technology Gene Bagdonis. 'We were impressed because the whole process was an online, task-based system.'

The QTAC system fulfilled UAC's requirements and provided a pathway to the future with a sophisticated rules-based engine for qualification assessment. Contracts were drawn up for UAC to licence the QTAC system. It would now be known as the University Admissions System (UAS).

Once UAS was up and running, QTAC stepped back and UAC used the system independently, developing technological solutions and re-writing much of the core code.

UAC continued to pay a licensing fee to QTAC for five years, until further development of what had been the QTAC system became uniquely UAC's.

#### Logistical implications

The arrival of UAS precipitated significant changes to the way UAC and participating universities operated.

At the Annual Review Meeting in February 1995, Gene Bagdonas outlined the requirements for UAS: 45 to 50 workstations, data-entry terminals, a network server, a new PABX, an air-conditioning upgrade, laser printers, electrical power modifications, uninterruptible power systems, and extensive reorganisation of offices. Every admissions office would also need one or two workstations to connect to the UAC system.

'It was a whole new ball game,' said Andrew Stanton.

In October 1995, two significant events occurred: the implementation of UAS96 was successfully completed and Andrew Stanton was appointed Director of UAC, having acted in the position for some time.



# The 1990s

## ARTS

The QTAC model included a subsystem for the retrieval of academic records called Automated Results Transfer System (ARTS). UAC explained in one of its regular bulletins to institutions that ARTS would reduce the university resources required to produce academic records, speed up applicant assessment and remove the ability of applicants to provide forged transcripts.

ARTS is still used by UAC and has also been adopted by all other admissions centres. As Peter Kruger notes, 'There are not many software systems that are still working 30 years after they were developed.'

## Data warehouse

The hard copy application reports, preference numbers and enrolment feedback that institutions relied on were replaced by the SAS data warehouse – a centralised repository of admissions information. Universities could use the SAS data analysis tools provided to them by UAC to draw customised, comprehensive datasets, perform sophisticated analysis, and populate their own student systems. In turn, UAC could receive data, such as enrolment numbers, from institutions.

## UAC website launches

In August 1998, UAC made another technological leap with the launch of its website – UAC Online. UAC Online included application information, course details, and links to participating institutions and interstate tertiary admissions centres.

Andrew Stanton's 1999 Annual Review Meeting report explained that the new website contained a significant part of the UAC Guide information, as well as an area for institutions with UAC policy documents, bulletins, processing schedules, and SAS FAQs.



## CENTRALISED ASSESSMENT

Up until the implementation of UAS, applications were received by UAC and sent on to the institutions.

Firaz Osman recalls the manual procedure: 'You looked at the preferences on the application and did a copy of the application for each university nominated. There were four photocopiers and they worked the whole time. One copy was put in a pigeon hole for each institution. The paper applications were then driven or couriered to the admission office of the institution.' The administration was enormous. 'There were 70,000 paper applications and each applicant has six preferences,' Firaz explained. The team coordinating this process consisted of Firaz, Ronnie Tantri, Imade Sudartha and Richard Hawkin. Donna Hancock, now UAC Customer Service Coordinator, also worked in this area for a while.

Many universities duplicated tasks already performed by UAC, such as checking applications then copying and distributing them to faculties.



UAC staff manually processing university applications



Applications were copied multiple times for each university nominated as a preference



In-house data entry was introduced to give greater control and make use of UAC's expertise. Year 12 forms were either entered into the system by UAC data entry operators or sent to a data entry bureau. For a while, OCR (optical character recognition) forms were used.

With the implementation of UAS, qualifications would be assessed centrally using an agreed set of schedules. QTAC believed that the centralised assessment model was the most administratively efficient way to process applications. One of its main design objectives was to store complete details of applicants' qualifications, enabling the automatic and expert application of institution entry and selection rules and facilitating institution decisions on credit transfer.

According to Andrew Stanton, it was a change of mindset, from *'selecting people for courses to allocating places'*.

### Common assessment procedures

The model required common assessment schedules for a core or base assessment of an applicant. A working party was convened – the NSW & ACT Working Party on Common Assessment Procedures (NAWPCAP). Many of the schedules developed at the time were based on the schedules used by the University of Sydney, Peter Kruger recalls.

Andrea Goodwin remembers the development of the first schedules as a very intense period: 'We had thousands of NAWPCAP meetings.'

It was expected that a number of university admissions staff would be seconded to UAC during the assessment period. For those institutions that couldn't send staff, UAC would employ casuals to act for them.

After the initial set-up of Centralised assessment for UC admissions, NAWPCAP continued as CAPS (Common Assessment Procedures Sub-committee) which

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meets annually and is comprised of representatives from UAC's participating institutions. Development and review of schedules is now carried out by UAC's Research, Development and Statistics team, and Assessment procedures are reviewed and developed by the Centralised Services team.

## **Educational disadvantage schemes**

In 1998, UAC offered a new service to institutions and students: a centralised system to apply for the various institution educational access schemes.

The schemes had different names, but they all offered students a pathway into university even if they didn't meet the UAI (Universities Admissions Index) cut-off advertised by an institution. The criteria for disadvantage varied from university to university, but generally included financial hardship, disability, chronic illness, disrupted schooling, geographical isolation and English not being spoken at home.

In its February 1997 meeting, the Users Committee agreed that if a common approach was to be established, then a standard form would be required. This would prove beneficial to applicants as the current terminology used to describe the same criteria for each institution varied and was confusing.

Andrea Goodwin recalled that, beyond developing guidelines, policies and procedures, and finding assessors, the challenge was finding agreement between institutions: 'Each institution had their own Equity Officer and process and their definitions of what a disadvantage was. For example, the University of Newcastle had three disadvantages but the University of NSW had 12. We had a lot of discussion to come to an agreement about a group of disadvantages that they would accept and not all institutions joined the scheme initially as a result.'

The program was named 'Educational Access Schemes' (EAS) and a common application form was developed for 1999 admissions. UAC assessors (some of whom were seconded from institutions) were tasked with following assessment guidelines and the outcomes from the assessment were sent to relevant universities to determine allocation of places.

EAS applications soared and institutions were keen for UAC to take a bigger role in managing the process and assessing applications.

In its first year, UAC processed 3,775 applications for EAS. Applications had grown exponentially and institutions were keen to give UAC a bigger role in managing this influx. In 2000 the scheme expanded even further with UAC undertaking partial assessment of EAS applications. It soon undertook full centralised assessment of EAS and in 2020 processed more than 13,000 applications.

## **Processing charge introduced**

Always mindful of its cost to institutions, UAC considered introducing an applicant processing charge as early as 1992.

In 1993, QTAC had started charging non-school leavers and those school leavers who did not use the computerised application system available to Queensland schools. Members of UAC's Management Committee noted that 'UAC could possibly introduce a similar charge for 1995 admissions'.

In 1995, with significant technological developments nearly complete, an application processing charge of \$25 was introduced for non-Year 12 (Form B) applicants. Year 12 students were exempt. In 2006 admissions, it was extended to interstate Year 12 applicants. The UAC Board wrote that it had made this decision in line with charges levied by other state admission centres.

The processing charge was paid by taking the application form to a branch of the National Australia Bank. Students were then required to post their form to UAC or bring it to the Auburn office. The late fee remained at \$60 for anyone who applied after 30 September.

### STUDENT SUPPORT

#### UAC InfoLine

In April 1996, UAC introduced an interactive voice response system for Year 12 applicants – the UAC InfoLine.

The 1997 Guide explained:

**'By using your telephone as a keyboard to interact directly with UAC's computer, you can obtain information and/or change specified information about your UAC application. You simply enter information by dialling or keying numbers on your telephone. Information is read out to you over the telephone. It's that easy!'**

The UAC InfoLine enabled Year 12 applicants to submit their application, check their preferences, change their preferences, access general information about admissions and find out if they had received an offer. International Baccalaureate and non-Year 12 applicants still needed to use a paper application.

UAC made special arrangements for students without telephone access and those who lived in areas of the state that were not connected to a 1900 number.

There was some criticism, however. Calls to the InfoLine from home phones were charged by Telstra at a rate of 75 cents a minute. Since UAC estimated it would take students on average six minutes to register, the average cost to apply would be \$4.50.

#### Online results

In October 1998, the NSW Board of Studies launched a new service to give HSC students their results through the internet, as well as through its HSC Telephone Results Service – on a Saturday. For the first time, students would receive their results as soon as they were known, and on a weekend, and would not have to wait for the traditional mail delivery.

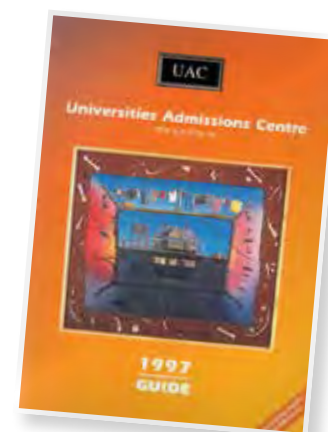
The Minister for Education, John Aquilina, said that allowing students to access their results earlier was seen as a step towards giving them more time to make decisions about their future options.

UAC also announced that it would release UAls on the UAC InfoLine the day after HSC results – on a Sunday.

#### New-look Guide

UAC's modernisation was not only internal. Andrea Smith, UAC's new Information Officer (now Andrea Marshall, UAC Project Manager), provided an overview of the 1996 UAC Guide at the Annual Review Meeting. A new-look layout was presented, including the first cover design drawn from ArtExpress, the annual exhibition of outstanding works from HSC Visual Arts.

It was noted that the desktop publishing had been brought in-house and 240,000 copies had been printed.





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In 1997, the Guide moved to the larger A4 format still used today.

When it came to information for international fee-paying students, UAC initially published the separate *Overseas Students Information Booklet* in 1992. The information varied between being incorporated into the Guide and a stand-alone booklet between 2008 and 2015 when the information went online.

## Special Tertiary Admissions Test

In 1996, the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) developed a common test specifically for tertiary admissions centres to administer. Many institutions required mature-age or special category applicants to sit the test.

Known as the Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT), the two-hour examination would be run throughout Australia from July to September each year.

UAC coordinated exam sittings in NSW and the ACT and sent applicants their results.

UAC STAT registration peaked at 4,900 in 2009. However, subsequent changes to admission requirements, increased competitiveness in the tertiary sector, the removal of admission caps and greater use of flexible entry points and alternative pathways decreased the relevance of STAT and by 2015–16 admissions registrations had declined to 1,567.

In 2016, UAC negotiated to return the responsibility for managing the program in NSW and ACT to ACER.



## APPLICATIONS FLATLINE

While higher education was being deregulated and universities were becoming more competitive, it seemed students were becoming less interested in tertiary study.

In October 1996, after applications closed, UAC statistics revealed that only 34,642 Year 12 students had applied for university in 1997 – a drop of 8.25 per cent on the year before. This confirmed the fears of university chiefs: that the Federal Government's plans to substantially lift the cost of obtaining a degree would lead to a collapse in enrolments. A similar drop in numbers was also seen by interstate tertiary admissions centres.

It was reported that universities had spent at least \$250,000 on promotional and advertising campaigns to encourage students to change their course preferences during the four days between receiving their results and the change of preference deadline. It worked. In

January 1997, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that nearly half of the school leavers who applied for a NSW university place that year – more than 19,000 students – had changed their course preferences.

In February, the paper reported:

**'Of the 1,000 courses on offer, almost a third have reported vacancies after the final round of offers, with regional universities the hardest hit by the drop in applications from school leavers . . . The downturn in enrolments is a headache for universities, which already have had their funding cut by more than \$680 million as part of the Government's overhaul of higher education.'**

In 1998 applications plummeted again. The most dramatic decline was in mature-age applicants, whose numbers fell by 12.5 per cent. Better job prospects and steep tuition fees were identified as reasons.

### Cut-offs drop

Throughout these years, entry scores for many courses were slashed and more than 3,000 additional places offered across NSW as universities battled to fill courses and avoid financial difficulties.

In a statement to *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 1999, the University of NSW Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alan Pettigrew, reasoned: 'I would not suggest it's a lowering of academic standards. It's a case of us managing the enrolment profile of the university with the requirements of the Federal Government. The penalties are there so we have to take all of that into account as well as academic standards.'

### Fee-paying students fill the gaps

In 1998, with higher education now deregulated, universities offered applicants a choice of taking a fee-based place or a fully funded place (HECS-based) in another course.

The 1999 Guide explained: 'Fee courses provide you with another option by allowing you to choose to fund the full cost of your course. Fee courses vary between \$9,000 and \$34,000 per year.' Applicants applied for these courses in exactly the same way as they applied for HECS courses but used the fee-paying course code for that course.

In the first year only two universities offered fee courses to local students: the University of NSW and the University of Sydney. Both institutions were keen to point out that the scheme was not a 'back-door' means of bringing in cashed-up but unqualified students. Fee-paying students would still need to come very close to the UAI cut-off.

Offers to fee courses were only made in the Main Round and the Final Round, although applicants could receive two offers in these rounds – one offer to the highest HECS course they were eligible for and one for the highest fee course they were eligible for.

Analysis of preferences at the end of the admission period showed that fee-paying students were high academic achievers who were mostly interested in high demand areas like commerce, law and engineering.

# The 1990s

## TER TROUBLES

In late 1995, NSW Premier Bob Carr appointed Professor Barry McGaw to undertake a NSW school system review covering curriculum, assessment and reporting, and post-school selection for work or further education.

The McGaw Report, released in March 1997, concluded that:

- ❖ the old HSC involved too many students studying courses that were not sufficiently challenging
- ❖ many schools were disadvantaged because they did not have the resources to offer all courses
- ❖ too much focus was placed on subjects that gave the best tertiary entrance rank.

McGaw recommended that the School Certificate and 3-unit subjects be abolished and that NSW universities change the way they select their students, including replacing the TER with a more flexible admissions system. Universities should continue to receive HSC results from the Board of Studies, which they could then use to select applicants for a place, but only under very strict conditions.

Professor McGaw told *The Sydney Morning Herald* that 'the TER had become a "high-status, beguilingly simple index", which was erroneously being used by parents, employers and the media as a measure of a school's academic success'. Teachers and parents also argued that the TER dominated the HSC and was not a good indicator of student achievement.

By the mid-1990s, the Year 12 retention rate was about 70 per cent and nearly 50 per cent of these students went on to tertiary studies. With about half of Year 12 students not intending to go on to tertiary study, the HSC's original purpose as a university entrance examination came under significant challenge.

## Confidentiality

Criticism of the TER was reignited in 1997 when *The Daily Telegraph* published a school photo and story about Mount Druitt High, in Sydney's west, under the headline: 'The class we failed'. No student at the school had received a TER above 45.

As a result of the outcry, the State Government barred public access to university admission scores and changed freedom of information legislation to make sure the data remained secret. Even schools were barred from receiving information about their students' TER performance.

This move was mostly supported by institutions. Professor Tony Blake, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Technology, Sydney, and the official representative of the NSW Vice-Chancellors in advising the McGaw Review, felt that 'while outstanding performance in the HSC should be a matter for celebration, the TER score was essentially a "private communication" between the UAC and applicants. Therefore, these scores should remain confidential.'

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney, Professor Gavin Brown, agreed and said he thought 'it was a very good idea to "defuse the hysteria" that had been previously associated with the TER scores'.

Others disagreed. Professor John Niland, Vice-Chancellor of the University of NSW, attacked the arrangements as too 'rigid' and 'secretive'. He said that the TER continued to be the fairest method of selecting



students for higher education, despite its many critics. As a result, he said, universities should be entitled to use the TER scores publicly to promote their courses while at the same time recognising those school leavers who had performed exceptionally well.

ATARs can still only be accessed by students. While they are also released to institutions for the purpose of making offers to courses, UAC does not provide ATARs to parents, schools or careers advisers.

### Taking the TER out of the HSC

In his goal to diminish the influence of the TER on the HSC, McGaw recommended that institutions advise students directly of their entrance score, rather than through the Board of Studies, with no publicity given to the TER. This recommendation was readily accepted by the government.

Many universities were not pleased with the advice, but major educational groups, the NSW Board of Studies and the Federation of Parents and Citizens all welcomed the move to break the nexus between the TER and the HSC.

George Cooney, head of the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Technical Committee on Scaling, supported the idea: 'Issuing the TER separately through the Universities Admissions Centre and only to students applying for university would reduce its importance as a measure of HSC performance ... This would emphasise the fact that the calculation of the TER and HSC results were a separate process.'

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Technology, Sydney, Professor Tony Blake, also supported the change:

**'The universities never wanted the TER to be included as part of the HSC reporting process. The HSC is meant to provide students and their families with an analysis of their achievements at the conclusion of six years of secondary schooling. It is foolish to imagine that a thorough report of performance can be accomplished with a single aggregate mark. It cannot.'**

Many believed, however, that the goal to remove the mystery that perplexed students and teachers – university scaling – had not been met.

UAC released TERs to NSW students on Tuesday 6 January 1998 – the same day that HSC results were released. The newly established TER Enquiry Centre received 5,000 calls during its two weeks of operation. By 2020, improved information sources and community engagement led to just over 900 calls to the ATAR Enquiry Centre.

## A NATIONAL ADMISSIONS SYSTEM

The idea of a national tertiary admissions system was one that came up frequently and in 1994 the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Mr Simon Crean, sought advice from the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. Such a system could include a national database on courses, institutions and entry requirements for universities and TAFE



# The 1990s

colleges. Practical barriers would need to be overcome, such as different admissions timetables in different states and the conversion of tertiary entrance scores between states. The minister announced \$700,000 to support the development of a National Tertiary Admission System.

## Agreement on a common scale

At the same time, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) had been looking at collecting, reporting and processing assessment data across states. It had also concluded that there was a need for a common basis for interstate TER comparisons.

MCEETYA set up a taskforce to devise a methodology for generating a common scale to report students' ranks and develop an interstate equivalent of results. UAC was represented by Andrew Stanton.

All states and territories reported students' positions with reference to the cohort of Year 12 students who were eligible for a TER. The different selection ranks were not compatible, however, because their Year 12 participation rates differed.

The decision was taken to adopt a full weighted age cohort as the reference population. In 1996, all states agreed on this common scale and it was known as the Interstate Transfer Index (ITI).

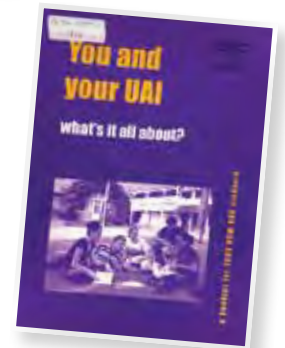
## Universities Admission Index

In 1998, all states and territories, except for Queensland, adopted the ITI as the state measure of student achievement, although they all used different names. In NSW, it was called the Universities Admission Index (UAI).

The calculation of the UAI was almost the same as for the TER. George Cooney, Chair of the Technical Committee on Scaling, explained that the only way



the UAI differed from the old TER was the name and the scale on which it was reported. In the last step of the process, it was determined what ranking the students would have received if all Year 10 students had completed Year 12. George Cooney said: 'I think it is fairer because it is saying to the students "Alright, this is your ranking within your age group" and that gives them a better indication of how they have performed, rather than saying "this is your performance in an elite group".'



The 1999 Guide explained that the change to the new scale would make interstate applications easier and allow universities to compare rankings across years.

Queensland maintained a profile-based approach to the reporting of senior secondary achievements until 2019, when the last OPs (Overall Positions) were reported. In 2020 it ranked students using the ATAR.

### THE MILLENNIUM BUG

The success of UAC's various technology upgrades in the second half of the decade brought unforeseen challenges.

The Year 2000 problem (Y2K), or 'millennium bug', was a global issue as the new century approached. It was based on the concern that computers would not be able to read the date when it became '00', therefore creating a glitch in computer systems from bank accounts to telephone systems.

All businesses, including UAC, worked to ensure their systems were glitch-proof and could operate if their computers went down.

As a risk avoidance measure, the Board of Studies announced that final exams would start three days earlier and HSC results would be available to students before Christmas, cutting short the anxious wait for final marks and avoiding the chance of a system error.

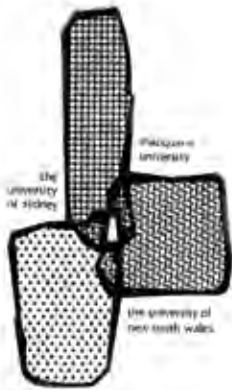
UAC reviewed its processes and announced that it would release the UAI the day after HSC results, on Saturday 18 December. These would be available from the UAC InfoLine and on the UAC website.

The change was heralded as a positive move and was maintained once the threat had passed. Results continue to be released before Christmas, giving students longer to make a decision about changing university preferences, due in early January.

On Friday 31 December 1999, UAC took defensive measures and gradually shut down all computer equipment from 12 noon. The UAC InfoLine, mail server, voice mail and UAC website remained operational. The systems were powered up on 2 January 2000 and no bugs were recorded.

UAC had passed the test and was sailing into the new millennium.





## UAC incorporated

Up until the mid-1990s, UAC and its previous iterations operated as an administrative division of the University of Sydney; a structure that had changed little since its inception in 1969. UAC had no separate legal identity and there were no written legal agreements between participating institutions.

UAC staff were employed by the University of Sydney and the University of NSW. UAC did not own the data it handled, it was unable to accumulate funds, and it could not lease or purchase accommodation or other goods and services in its own right: one of the participating universities had to act on its behalf.

When the NSW Freedom of Information Act was introduced in 1989, UAC, as part of a public university, became susceptible to requests for information on its operations.

In 1991, the Management Committee and the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Conference (as it was known then) began to discuss UAC becoming an incorporated body. A chief concern was the question of UAC's legal responsibility and liability. The existing set-up offered a degree of legal protection as UAC's lack of legal identity would mean that any legal action brought against it would require simultaneous legal action against all participating universities. But by becoming a company, the company's owners (the shareholders) could limit their personal liability and were generally not liable for company debts. The Committee agreed to seek a legal opinion.



In 1992, concerns about legal liability were realised when an applicant took UAC, the University of Sydney and the University of NSW to the Supreme Court over his unsuccessful application to the respective university law schools. The applicant had undertaken the Victorian Certificate of Education, which had qualified him for admission to Melbourne University and Monash University law schools. However, as the entrance ranks in each state were calculated differently, he did not qualify for admission to the Sydney law schools. The applicant argued that he should be given the same ranking in NSW as he had been given in Victoria. The court found in favour of UAC and the universities and, although appealed in August 1993, the decision stood.

UAC's plans to become an incorporated entity moved forward.

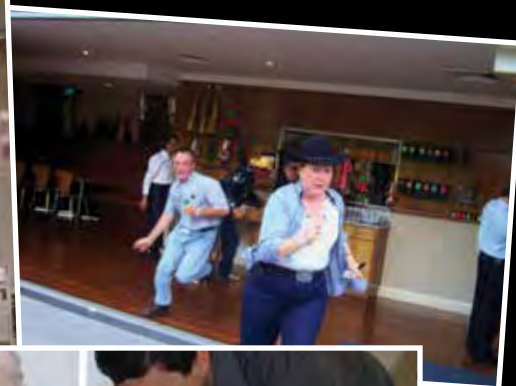
The NSW Vice-Chancellors' Conference approved the incorporation of UAC as a company at its meeting on 6 March 1995. The UAC Board and the Users Committee were established.

UAC Pty Ltd came into being in June 1995. In 1996 it became the Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) Pty Ltd, a company owned by UniProjects Pty Ltd, in turn owned by the NSW Vice-Chancellor's Conference.

# Case study



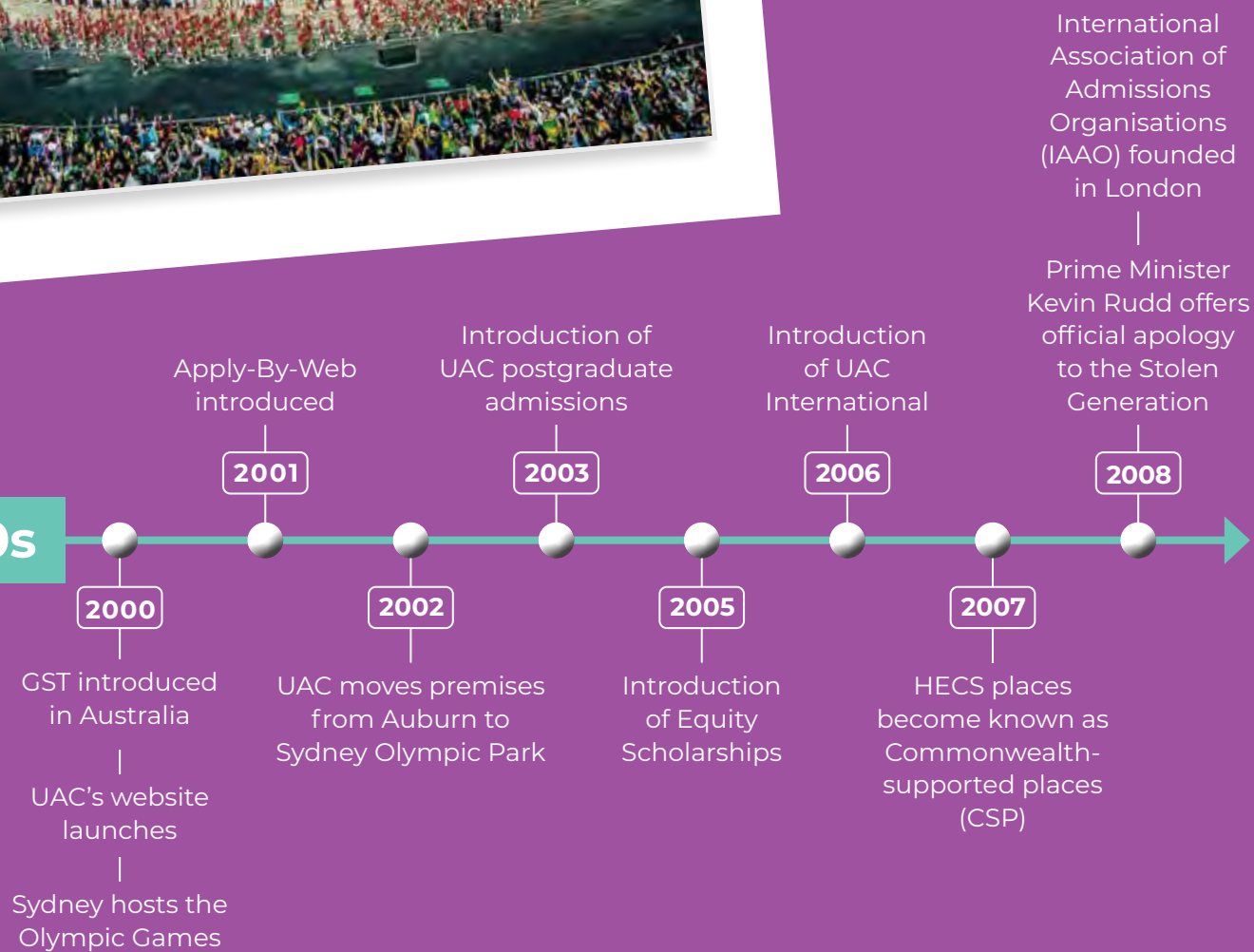








## 2000s



# Chapter 5

## BEYOND BORDERS – THE 2000s

The new millennium brought with it a sense of optimism. The Sydney Olympic Games celebrated international cooperation through sport and enlivened the country.

Controlling expenses through spending cuts was the goal of the Howard government and higher education funding was in decline. Institutions adopted a cautious approach to admissions but were given the ability to raise revenue through fees and commercial activities. Private colleges flourished.

The election of Kevin Rudd in 2007 was on a platform of revitalising higher education and its Bradley Review reforms focused on expansion, regulation and increased enrolments from disadvantaged groups. The demand for higher education was strong regardless, due to the gloomy economic outlook caused by the Global Financial Crisis.

The major event at UAC was the implementation of online applications. Apply-by-Web was next-generation technology that provided a leap forward in how the organisation operated. It was followed by the Equity Scholarships Online application portal.

UAC's success in managing undergraduate admissions for its institutions led to the expansion of its services to include postgraduate admissions and admissions for an expanded group of overseas students.

As the decade ended, the globalisation of higher education was well underway.

### HOWARD AND COSTELLO'S FUNDING REFORMS

The noughties began optimistically: applications were once again on the upswing and university study had never been more accessible. There were more than 672,000 university students in Australia, a massive 21 times the number enrolled 50 years earlier.

Reasons for the jump included a post-Olympic rush and fears of an economic recession due to political nervousness after 9/11 and the invasion of Afghanistan.

In the May 2003 budget, John Howard's government announced a new 10-year plan to control the expense and direction of higher education places. Treasurer Peter Costello told Parliament universities must provide the quality courses students want and the nation needs.

While fully funded places in 'national priority areas' would be increased, overall the government's contribution to higher education funding was dropping. In 2003 it was only 40 per cent (20 years earlier it was about 90 per cent) and it would continue to head downwards.

In 2004, universities adopted a cautious student admissions strategy, fearing government penalties. The media reported on thousands of aspiring tertiary students missing out on offers, 'squeezed between rising demand and fewer places'. With places limited and offers down, entrance scores were up.

#### Fee-paying places grow

At the core of the broad Howard government reforms, to take place from 1 January 2005, was the freedom of universities to raise more of their revenue

through fees and commercial activities. Quotas on full fee-paying places were doubled, but universities would be penalised for over-enrolling students.

In the past few years, the Australian Catholic University, Charles Sturt University, the University of NSW and the University of Sydney had offered up to 200 degree courses to Australian students who were prepared to pay full fees up front. By 2005, the University of Newcastle and Southern Cross University were added to the list.

#### HELP

Two new government loan programs were introduced: FEE-HELP, for full fee-paying domestic students, and OS-HELP, for students studying abroad for one or two semesters of their degree. Like HECS, HELP loans were repaid through the taxation system.

### KEVIN 07 AND THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION

The Rudd Labor Government, like many governments before it, won the 2007 election on a platform of revolutionising education. It committed to fostering graduates with the knowledge, skills and innovation the economy needed, replacing full fee-paying domestic places with government-funded places, and doubling the number of scholarships for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### Bradley Review

In March 2008, the Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, announced a tertiary education review. Chaired by Denise Bradley, the former Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Australia, the Bradley Review found that the nation's universities



# The 2000s

faced significant threats and that the quality of higher education had deteriorated due to inadequate spending.

As a result, the Labor Government announced significant reforms. There would be an injection of cash into universities. Education funding would be deregulated, so from 2012 there would be no caps on the number of places universities could offer to students. The goal was to have 40 per cent of all 25 to 34-year-olds holding a qualification at bachelor level or above by 2025.

Students with lower-income parents would be big winners. Twenty per cent of higher education enrolments should come from people with low socio-economic backgrounds by 2020 and there would be more support for financially disadvantaged students.

Two new bodies were formed: the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency would ensure higher education providers met minimum quality standards and promote best practice and the Australian Qualifications Framework Council would build links between university and vocational education.

## Growth of international students

When the government put an end to domestic fee-paying courses, universities lost an important source of revenue. They warned that the additional 20,000 government-funded places would not make up for the millions of dollars they stood to lose.

Universities made up for the decline by dramatically increasing their numbers of overseas students. By 2005, overseas students represented 22 per cent of university enrolments. Some critics predicted that this dependence would result in financial difficulties.

In September 2007, the Australian Government made changes to its skilled migration laws to allow overseas students to remain in Australia for 18 months after they graduated and earn points towards permanent residency. This added incentive to study in Australia meant the growth of this group of students was set to continue.



## Growth of private colleges

Alongside the growth of higher education, students had more choices than ever as institutions competed for enrolments.

The introduction of FEE-HELP and government accreditation of privately run degree-level courses saw the growth of private colleges that focused on vocational or niche courses.

Students were increasingly looking for degrees that gave them practical skills and industry-specific training. Andrew Smith, the national executive officer of the Australian Council of Private Education and Training said: 'As independent organisations, private colleges can readily adapt to the needs of industry and students.'

## Global Financial Crisis

The Global Financial Crisis hit hard between 2007 and 2009. The glum economic outlook made for a competitive job market, and gaining skills and qualifications became a more attractive option.

UAC application numbers peaked for the decade in 2009: 83,400 applications were processed.

### OLYMPIC EFFORTS

The year of the Sydney 2000 Olympics was a memorable one for UAC, which was located nearby at Auburn. Planning had been underway for some time to avoid unnecessary disruptions caused by this international sporting assembly.

UAC put together its admissions timetable for the year with this major event in mind. Two key changes were made: the on-time application closing date was moved forward by two weeks to 14 September and UAC implemented a partial shutdown, operating with skeleton staff, while the Olympics were running. Institutions and businesses all over Sydney were doing the same.

But there were major events happening at UAC as well.

### APPLY ONLINE

With the new millennium dawning, UAC took a leap forward with the implementation of a business-changing technology: Apply-by-Web (known internally as the ABW project).

Ross Walsh, Operations Manager during this period, recalled: 'We had upwards of 16 data entry staff to process the 40,000 applications in the period September to early November, so implementing Apply-by-Web saved a lot of time, effort and resources. Data entry was now done by the applicant.'

The online application also improved the applicant experience. Ross Walsh explained: 'In previous years they would submit an application form and it would sit in a black hole for four months. If they were lucky, they got an offer in January. If they wanted to change their preferences, they needed to mail a formal letter. Now they could monitor the progress of the application and change their preferences whenever they wanted to.'

The Apply-by-Telephone service and the UAC InfoLine remained for applicants to change their preferences and check their UAI and offers.

A processing charge of \$11 was introduced for Year 12s for the first time. They could pay online using a credit card, using the Australia Post BillPay service or over the counter at an Australia Post outlet. Non-Year 12s could also use Apply-by-Web or submit a Form B, enclosed in the Guide, for a flat fee of \$27.50.

Although the application system was automated, UAC still posted acknowledgement of application letters in November.

The new system meant changing preferences was easier. Instead of posting their change of preference card to UAC, applicants could log in to their application. In the first year of online applications, more than 19,600 Year 12 students changed their preferences after they received their HSC results – 2,000 more than the previous year.

The dual application systems remained in place until 2007 admissions, after which the Apply-By-Telephone system was closed. From 2008 admissions onwards, all applicants applied through UAC's website.

### EQUITY SCHOLARSHIPS

For many years, in an effort to improve access for students from low-income backgrounds, institutions had funded scholarships, known as Institution Equity Scholarships (IES) – typically general financial help such as loans, bursaries, scholarships or prizes.



# The 2000s

In 2004, as part of its 10-year plan to create a more diverse and equitable higher education sector, the Howard government introduced Commonwealth Learning Scholarships (CLS), 7,000 of which were to be allocated to rural, regional, low-income and Indigenous students each year.

The CLS program, overseen by the Department of Education, Science and Training, consisted of two different schemes:

- ❖ Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarships, which provided \$2,000 a year towards tuition
- ❖ Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships, which provided \$4,000 a year for accommodation expenses when moving from a rural area to study at an institution.

The Commonwealth provided guidelines for the allocation of these scholarships; however, individual institutions determined their own selection and allocation processes and applicants applied directly to the institutions.

With the growth in applications to Educational Access Schemes and CLS on the horizon, dedicated staff were required. Gordon Clutterham was hired in 2004 as manager of the newly formed Equity Unit.

For 2005 admissions, UAC coordinated CLS scholarship applications for Macquarie University, the University of Technology, Sydney and the University of Canberra.

For 2006 admissions, under the banner of Equity Scholarships, UAC became the central processing point for CLS and IES applications for most of its institutions: applicants only had to complete one form (downloaded from the UAC website or provided in the CLS booklet) to apply.

For 2008, applications were made through Apply-by-Web and for 2009 admissions, UAC launched the Equity Scholarships Online portal.

In 2020 UAC processed applications for Institution Equity Scholarships and the Indigenous Student Success Program, funded by the Australian Government. It receives more than 7,000 applications for Equity Scholarships every year.

## NEXT GENERATION ADMISSIONS – WUAS

The launch of Equity Scholarships Online marked the successful trial of a significant technological improvement at UAC. In 2008 a project was formed to transition its admissions system, UAS, away from reliance on Sun workstations to a web-based system that could be used from any desktop or laptop and required only access to an internet browser.

Farouk Ho, UAC's Software Manager, then the senior software developer, began work on the conversion of UAS to Java.

This was completed for 2010 admissions and this next generation admissions system was to be known as web Universities Admission System, or wUAS.

## NEW ENVIRONMENTS

### Mid-year

Due to an increase in Northern Hemisphere students applying to Australian institutions, and the growth of post-school applicants, mid-year admissions were increasing.

The NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee meeting in early 1999 noted that the Board did not support universities processing significant numbers of applicants outside the UAC system, 'given that it introduces equity issues and impacts on both UAC and member universities,



both procedurally and financially'. But the Vice-Chancellors did ask UAC to investigate ways in which it could meet the changing needs of its members.

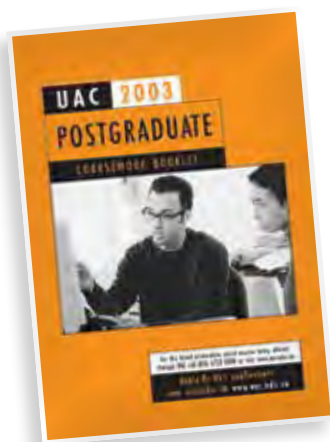
UAC proposed the introduction of centralised mid-year admissions, the extension of the application period for the main intake, and provision of additional allocation runs. The institutions agreed that UAC could introduce and trial mid-year admissions (with 11 institutions) starting in 2001 and an extended application period for 2002 admissions.

UAC printed 10,000 copies of the 30-page mid-year supplement and application form, available to applicants free of charge from UAC or the participating institutions and promoted through ads on radio and in newspapers.

In 2001, 695 mid-year applications were received.

By 2008, 16 institutions were participating and 800 courses were available. Almost 6,000 people applied and UAC made 4,185 offers.

In 2012, the last year of a dedicated mid-year admissions period, UAC had received nearly 7,000 applications.



### Postgraduate

A number of institutions acknowledged they were making significant savings through centralised processing of undergraduate students and expressed an interest in exploring options for a similar postgraduate arrangement.

After investigations by working parties, it was recommended that a pilot postgraduate application system be launched for mid-year

2003 applications. It also recommended that distance education courses be processed through UAC for 2004 admissions.

Applications would open in early April and close at the end of June. There would be a separate postgraduate area on the UAC website with links to institution websites and a course search facility. A Postgraduate Coursework Booklet would be produced, along the lines of the Guide – 15,000 copies were printed in the first year – with a list of courses, institution general information, links to institution websites and an application form.

Applicants could apply using the form in the booklet or the Apply-by-Web system and select up to six preferences. The fee was \$33.

Four institutions participated in the pilot centralised postgraduate program:

- ❖ Macquarie University
- ❖ University of New England
- ❖ University of Newcastle
- ❖ University of Technology, Sydney.

They offered a limited number of their postgraduate coursework programs: around 150 courses for semester 2, 2003 admission.

The pilot program was considered successful, and seven institutions participated in postgraduate admissions for 2004.

### Distance education

Along with what they studied, how students studied was also changing. Distance education courses were first offered through UAC in 2006 with the participation of Macquarie University, the University of NSW and the University of Western Sydney.

# The 2000s

## NEW-LOOK HSC, OLD SCALING FEARS

In 2001, the scaling procedure was changed in response to the perception that academically able students were being encouraged to study easy courses in order to increase their UAI. The Technical Committee on Scaling decided that the maximum marks in courses would be determined on the basis of the academic quality of the course candidatures.

The UAI eligibility requirements were also changed to what we know them to be today: satisfactory completion of at least 10 units of Board Developed courses, including 2 units of English. From 2001, the UAI calculation would be based on an aggregate of scaled marks from the best 2 units of English and the best 8 units from remaining courses, with no more than 2 units of Category B courses included.

These changes were not well received. The government and teachers felt they would favour students who took HSC maths and science and discriminate against those studying humanities subjects.

Professor George Cooney rejected the claims: 'The humanities are treated no worse than the sciences. They are all scaled the same way,' he said.

The criticism continued into 2002. The headmaster at Sydney Grammar, John Vallance, claimed: 'In terms of sophistication, the UAI entrance system is a little like a watchmaking business run by blacksmiths.'

George Cooney responded: 'All the research shows that for most university courses the UAI is efficient, transparent and has considerable predictive power for university success, especially in first-year courses.'

Andrew Stanton was quoted in the media: 'The Universities Admissions Centre hopes the new HSC will provide employers, students and parents with more information than they ever had before. And those students that decide not to go on to university will not be penalised as much for taking vocationally based subjects.'



The implementation of the new HSC also reignited the controversy over the confidentiality provisions in the reporting of UAIs to schools, the Board of Studies or the media.

Private schools agitated repeatedly for the right to see their students' UAI. It was even reported that Sydney Grammar was considering Supreme Court action against UAC's 'culture of secrecy'.

The Minister for Education, Andrew Refshauge, said he would consider the concerns of the schools. 'However, I would need to be convinced this information would not be used to compile league tables,' he said.

The UAI would remain confidential.

### COMPETITIVE BONUSES

Following the Howard government's 2005 reforms, around 20,000 government-funded places were added to balance the supply and demand for university education.

While universities had more places to offer, the strength of the economy and low unemployment resulted in a 3 per cent downturn in the number of people applying for university in 2006.

By 2007, the total number of offers made by the universities was 73,025.

The competition for students led to universities becoming creative in their recruitment tactics. The non-metropolitan institutions of Charles Sturt, Southern Cross, Newcastle, Wollongong and Western Sydney reached out to local students and offered them between 3 and 10 points on top of their UAI scores.



Schemes to enable access to institutions through alternative means – beyond the use of the UAI – were also developing. Several universities accepted students with university entrance scores lower than the official cut-off marks if they had done well in subjects relevant to their course. The University of NSW formalised this practice for 2008 entrants with a scheme called HSC Plus.

What became known as bonus points soon spread to most institutions and featured in many of our communications into the 2010s and beyond, and in 2017 became known as adjustment factors as part of a push towards greater transparency in admissions.

### UAC INTERNATIONAL

#### International gateway

For 2008 admissions, international students attempting an Australian Year 12 outside of Australia, an International Baccalaureate or the New Zealand NCEA could apply through UAC. Given that UAC did not provide Guides and services to international students, institutions agreed that it was an equitable approach to allow these students to apply through UAC.

To facilitate the process, UAC launched its new gateway for international students, UAC International, consisting of a booklet, website and online application.

The UAC International booklet for 2008 admissions included information about the 16 institutions that participated through UAC and the services they provided. It explained to applicants: 'UAC now also processes applications for a specific group of international students. By applying for admission to tertiary courses through UAC, your task is made much easier than if you were required to apply separately to each institution.'

Course descriptions were not in the publication but were available on the new UAC International area of the website.

Agent Services was also launched, so agents of international students could access applicant information.

At the inaugural International Annual Review Meeting in March 2008, Operations Manager Andrea Goodwin congratulated all involved in the establishment of UAC International in a very short timeframe and thanked university staff for their commitment and cooperation in its development.

That year international student enrolments in higher education were at an all-time high with more than 440,000 studying in Australia.



# The 2000s

## Cross-border cooperation

The growth in international students was not unique to Australia. The globalisation of higher education was a trend.

UAC Managing Director Andrew Stanton felt that there would be much to be learned from the exchange of information from student admissions organisations internationally and, in 2008, UAC became a founding member of the International Association of Admissions Organisations.

The organisation was formed by centralised post-secondary education admissions organisations from all over the world. Its goal was to provide a forum to exchange information and insights that could aid the further development of centralised admissions for higher education.

Stanton represented UAC and Australia at its inaugural meeting in London. The second meeting was hosted and chaired by UAC in Sydney and other ACTAC (The Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres) members were able to attend.

Users meeting minutes reported that the keynote speaker focused on widening participation. Seventeen not-for-profit organisations from around the world were involved, with the network of countries expected to grow. UAC also hosted a forum on 'Widening participation in tertiary education: perspectives and programs' with over 40 representatives from NSW and ACT attending.

The first decade of the new millennium had seen UAC share its expertise beyond borders.





Elizabeth Liddle's  
retirement



Donna Hancock and  
Penny Millgate

## The UAC social club

The UAC social club came into being in 2001 with the objective to 'foster morale and promote team spirit'.

The social club committee was initially made up of Kathryn Broadbent, Tanja Jordanov, Pak Liu and Andrew Stanton, and later joined by Jacob Fonseca and Annemarie Moloney.

The committee organised many functions, including afternoon teas, monthly barbecues hosted by each department, Melbourne Cup celebrations, charity morning teas, midday roasts, Chinese banquets, a Christmas luncheon and the UAC Christmas party.

Activities included a book club, lunchtime swimming, tennis, movie and theatre nights, footy tipping and, once the organisation moved to Sydney Olympic Park, a walking group.

UAC purchased a DVD home theatre sound system, which was set up in the conference room, and made available for use by staff – with work use taking precedence, of course. Some staff used it to screen movies during lunch. Each fortnight, movies were screened for staff wanting to 'wind down' after a long day's work. Tanja Jordanov recalls:

***'Barbecues and movie nights were very popular . . . and also my personal favourites!'***

Others recall extravagant desk decorations undertaken for staff who had special events: marriages, babies, retirements, holidays.

Event highlights in its first year included a 10-pin bowling night that saw Michelle Fitzsimmons receive a merit for 'most frequent use of the gutter'.

An Easter Fest was held with a barbecue in the carpark. It included an Easter egg hunt and a bonnet parade judged by Andrea Goodwin and Andrew Harrop. In what was described as a tough competition, Donna Hancock was named the winner.

The July monthly barbecue was hosted by Operations and Assessment and themed Christmas in July. The roast was described as a 'truly magnificent feast'. Staff participated in 'Stick the Dot on Santa's nose' – won by a whisker by Catherine Walsh – and Christmas charades.

Another monthly barbecue hosted by Publications and Information Services had the theme 'Back to childhood'. A 'Guess the baby' photo competition ended in a tie between Val Apps and Elizabeth Liddle. A game of musical chairs was won by Val.

The social club had its own newsletter, 'Social Club News'. As well as updates on events, the newsletter contained staff comings and goings, weddings, births and retirements.

Tanja says that the most satisfying part of the social club committee was being able to organise a variety of enjoyable events for colleagues and encouraging them to take part in some workplace fun while getting to know each other better.

**'Social events  
became part of UAC's  
culture.'**

As staff numbers grew it became harder for the small committee to recruit members and organise events. Eventually, the committee was disbanded, and it was agreed that social events would be held ad hoc.

Time will tell if the new home at Rhodes inspires a re-imagining of the UAC social club for the 2020s and beyond.



# Case study











**2010s**

ATAR replaces UAI

**2010**

Australia's first female Prime Minister sworn in by Australia's first female Governor General

Private providers join UAC as participating institutions

**2012**

First institution-branded application portal is launched

Full demand-driven funding system introduced for bachelor places

The last time UAC offers are published in newspapers

Introduction of Schools Recommendation Schemes (SRS)

**2014**

David Christie appointed as UAC's Managing Director

**2015**

UAC Connect is launched

**2016**

Same-sex marriage becomes legal in Australia

**2017**

Digital ATAR Notices verified using blockchain technology

UAC celebrates 50 years

**2018**

Introduction of UAC Reach and UAC Insights

**2019**



# Chapter 6

## CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION – THE 2010s

The 2010s was a decade of fast growth for UAC as it responded to the new admission goals and processes of its institutions.

A full-year application cycle, the addition of pathway courses and the launch of centralised Schools Recommendation Schemes were some of the early major changes. But perhaps the most radical change made to accommodate diverse institution needs was the roll out of a series of bespoke application portals. Having successfully developed an application for UTS Business School in 2012, UAC harnessed this capability to offer multiple institutions the best of both worlds: a direct relationship with the applicant and access to UAC's assessment and systems expertise.

UAC took a proactive role in introducing technological solutions to the education sector. The release of the 2017 ATAR using blockchain technology demonstrated the potential of verifiable credentials, while the UAC Advance credit management concept incorporated machine-learning techniques and a sophisticated rules engine.

UAC's data capability also came to the fore, with a new Business Analytics team charged with supporting organisational planning and contributing insights to the higher education sector across the board.

Partnerships with government, other admission centres and institutions ramped up. The Bridges to Higher Education project saw UAC and five metropolitan universities develop a website to support aspiring university students, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds. For the Course Seeker website, a national listing of all undergraduate courses, UAC took the lead in steering collaboration between the Federal Government and state admissions centre and developing the site.

As the 2010s came to an end, UAC was stronger than ever. New business lines, new clients and new innovations had seen it progress well beyond its roots.

### ADMISSIONS TRANSPARENCY

In the early part of the decade, university recruitment tactics were beginning to attract attention. Offers to students who had selection ranks significantly below the published cut-offs led to concerns from academics and business leaders about the impact of ‘pumping underqualified graduates into the workforce’.

In January 2016, the spotlight fell on university admissions again, with a Fairfax Media investigation finding up to 60 per cent of students were admitted to university even though their selection rank was below the advertised cut-offs.

By February, in a swift response to growing community pressure, the Abbott government announced that a Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP), led by Peter Shergold, would examine options for improving the transparency of university admissions policies.

HESP released its final report in November 2016. Its 14 recommendations focused on resolving the ‘lack of clarity on the use of ATAR rankings and the basis on which bonus points are awarded by universities’. The government accepted all the recommendations and announced plans to clear away the ‘fog and double speak that has clouded higher education admissions processes so students can make informed decisions about what to study and where’. Universities and admissions centres across Australia would now be required to publish detailed information about the ATARs of students admitted to courses at institutions and adopt common admissions terminology.

The NSW Government also had concerns about lax admission policies, with a particular focus on teaching degrees. It accused the universities of using teaching students as ‘cash cows’. In early 2015, Education Minister Adrian Piccoli announced that teaching places would be restricted to students who had achieved a minimum of three Band 5s, including English, in their HSC.

### ADMISSIONS BOOM

The decade started with a bang for UAC, with 86,007 applications and 72,663 offers, thanks to a record number of HSC students and additional places made available as a result of the 2008 Bradley Review.

Institutions were reaching out in all directions to recruit students. *The Daily Telegraph* described 2010 as the best year ever to be an HSC student: ‘Putting your skills and knowledge on the line in NSW school exit exams is all about prospects and for the 2009-ers in NSW they are unsurpassed. For the first time, in 2010, universities have the freedom to over-enrol by up to 10 per cent and the extra places will all be fully funded by federal coffers.’

In 2012, when enrolments were officially uncapped, UAC received 86,584 applications and made 79,869 offers. By 2015, offers exceeded applications in what was to become the new normal, with 87,777 applications and 88,465 offers.

### ATAR ARRIVES

The first year of the decade was also the first year of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

In NSW, the ATAR was different from the UAI in two ways, beyond its name: the highest rank would be 99.95 instead of 100 and it would indicate a student’s position in relation to their Year 7, rather than Year 10, cohort.

# The 2010s

One thing that didn't change was the ongoing public interest. UAC and the ATAR were the subject of many media reports. For example, on ATAR release day in 2014, *The Sydney Morning Herald* visited the UAC Customer Service team and published a story about what it was like behind the scenes taking phone calls from students and their parents. In 2018, despite a paper from the Mitchell Institute claiming the ATAR was irrelevant, UAC's resident statistician, Helen Tam, was featured in a *Sydney Morning Herald* profile aptly titled 'Magic number: the complex way each ATAR is conjured'.



## COLLEGES BACK ON BOARD

In a 'back to the future' move that reflected the trend towards broader choices for applicants, UAC invited non-university higher education providers to participate in UAC's centralised admissions system in 2013.

Due to the work involved in training new institutions, the number was capped at six, with nine other providers taken on as 'apply direct' institutions.

UAC applicants could now apply for up to 24 institutions in a single application.

## SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

### Electronic document lodgement

As UAC grew it continued to refine and improve its internal systems and processes.

For 2012 admissions, UAC introduced an electronic document lodgement facility through its application

management portal Check & Change. Applicants could lodge portfolios or statements to support their application, avoiding the need to print the document cover sheet and post or deliver these to UAC or institutions. Later development enabled applicants to upload all their documents through Check & Change.

In the decade to follow, COVID-19 precipitated the move to abandon post and delivery altogether, with all applicants required to upload documents through their application.

### QAS

In 2011, the Qualifications Assessment Service (QAS) was launched.

Developed in-house, QAS helped applicants determine their eligibility for university study, particularly those seeking graduate entry to the University of Sydney Medical School and the Australian Defence Force Academy.

In 2013 the system moved online, as UAC continued on its digital journey.



### Educational Access Schemes online

EAS grew significantly in this period, as applicants became more aware of their eligibility and of the potential to help them secure a university place. In 2012, EAS applications jumped 16 per cent, taking the overall number to 10,813. By 2014, there were more than 20,000 EAS applicants.

In 2018, an online EAS application was developed. This reduced the number of paper-based applications received by UAC, particularly those hand-delivered to Customer Service on the main closing date. The queue out the door of the customer service counter area, processing time, staff time – and lost mail – were all significantly reduced.

## COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

UAC has always prided itself on the positive relationships it has forged with institutions and the broader higher education sector.

Back in 1990, Alan Findlay, Assistant Registrar at Macquarie University, noted that 'UAC had achieved a remarkable level of cooperation between NSW tertiary institutions'.

Andrew Stanton also noted this as one of UAC's strengths: 'UAC had an important function in that it was a conduit and often a useful intermediary for the universities and other organisations, bringing them together.'

### Make Your Mark

One of several Federal Government-funded initiatives to boost the number of university students from low socio-economic backgrounds was the Bridges to Higher Education project, a collaboration between UAC and five metropolitan universities.

UAC developed and launched a key element of the project, the Make your Mark website, in April 2014, with a range of tools and resources for aspiring university students and their teachers and parents.

### HESP Implementation Working Group

UAC was a supportive partner of the HESP review, with Managing Director David Christie becoming a member of the HESP Implementation Working Group. In the 2016–17 annual report he wrote: 'UAC is fully committed to improving the transparency of admissions systems and to making them more nationally consistent, which will benefit not only prospective students, but also the sector, the government and the community.'

The Managing Director wasn't the only one doing the heavy lifting. Many UAC staff were now involved in ensuring that all UAC's information for prospective students complied with the transparency recommendations, an effort that continues to this day.

### Course Seeker

HESP had also recommended the establishment of a new website listing all undergraduate courses nationally.

UAC quickly took the lead in this development, steering a collaboration with the Department of Education and Training and the other tertiary admissions centres.

Launched in November 2018, the Course Seeker website gives students access to comprehensive, consistent and comparable information and remains as a lasting legacy of the transparency reforms. In 2020 it was expanded to include government-subsidised short courses available to support workers displaced by the pandemic.

# The 2010s

## BUSINESS CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION

The recommendations of the 2008 Bradley Review, which included uncapped university places and a significant widening of participation in higher education, had such broad consequences that in July 2010 UAC organised a forum to identify how it could help institutions meet the Bradley goals.

The Future Directions Forum resulted in a new direction for UAC named Business Change and Transformation (BCAT).

In October 2011, the Users Committee agreed on a range of BCAT projects, including a full-year application cycle and inclusion of pathway courses in undergraduate admissions.

### Year-round admissions

Year-round admissions began in August 2013 with the merging of end-of-year and mid-year admissions. Applicants were now able to apply for courses starting throughout the year with a single application.

Now that the admissions year spanned two calendar years, that year's Guide became the *UAC Guide 2013–14*, and applicants had to choose their preferred start date when selecting their preferences.

The biggest changes, however, were in the back-end systems, including the merging of admissions databases and SAS data libraries. Offer rounds were increased to align with university trimesters, qualifications were assessed at the time of initial check, and printed offer and unsuccessful letters were discontinued and instead accessed online.

### Added pathways

For 2014–15 admissions pathway courses were added. Applicants could now add a pathway course to their list of preferences or an institution could make a 'slipback' offer to applicants who didn't meet the entry requirements for their preferred degree course.

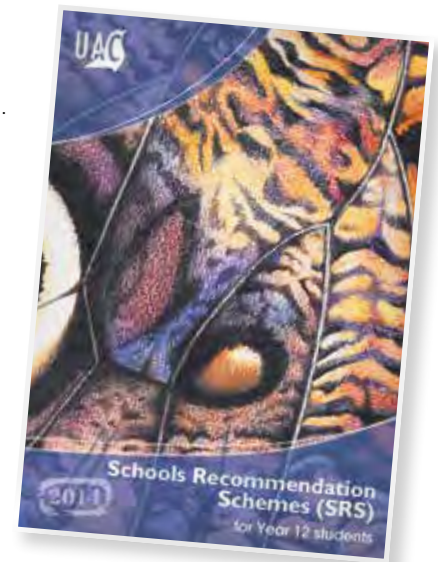
### Schools Recommendation Schemes

The Future Directions Forum also considered the development of a centralised application and assessment process through UAC to replace existing principal report schemes managed by separate institutions.

A working party was formed and agreement was reached to launch Schools Recommendation Schemes (SRS) through UAC for 2014–15 admissions. SRS would allow schools to recommend Year 12 students who had applied through UAC for early offers.

The scheme was open to students at all schools and invitations to participate in SRS were sent to 1,700 schools nationally.

In the first year, nine institutions participated in SRS with 1,376 applications from 432 different schools. A successful new venture for UAC was up and running, and SRS has continued to grow: in 2022 there were more than 25,000 SRS applications from all over Australia.



### NEW ADMISSIONS MODEL

#### Early bird offers

Many predicted that the implementation of a demand-driven system and deregulation of the sector would be the beginning of the loosening of central admissions and, as the competition for students increased, direct early offers became a way for institutions to reach out to students.

By 2015, the number of offers made ahead of the main release had grown to almost 30,000, double that of two years earlier, and main round offers were decreasing as a consequence.

#### Flexible offerings

It wasn't long before UAC once again adapted. In April 2016, David Christie reported to the Users Committee that there had been 'significant changes in the way universities admit students, thereby highlighting the need for UAC to evolve and adapt to the changes'.

UAC was tasked with identifying a successor to the undergraduate admissions system so as to avoid further drift of applications away from the centralised model.

In September 2015 the Admissions Model Advisory Group was formed. During a rigorous 10-month review process, UAC consulted widely among institutions and applicants.

The conclusion reached was that rather than trying to meet every institution's needs through one undergraduate model, UAC would improve the current system to make it more flexible, but, more significantly, offer institutions tailored services to address their direct application needs.

Changes to the current system were implemented for 2017–18 admissions. The main offer round was brought forward from January to December, taking place shortly after ATARs were released and reducing the month-long wait for offers for most Year 12 students. The number of preferences was reduced from nine to five, with analysis of offers showing that few offers were made below the fifth preference.

In 2019, further tweaks were made, with the admissions year opening at the beginning of April instead of August and closing in March instead of February. The Guide was also re-imagined and shortened to reflect the importance of UAC's website in providing up-to-date information to applicants.

### INNOVATION FOR APPLICANTS

With a history of technological innovation, UAC's focus was now on positioning itself as a leader in the higher education sector.

#### ATAR on the blockchain

In December 2017, UAC released ATARs to NSW HSC students using state-of-the-art blockchain technology. Recording ATARs on the Ethereum blockchain meant that they could not be altered or faked and could be verified in real time.

UAC was proud to be recognised for this innovation. It was awarded Best Process Innovation in August 2018 by *The Australian Financial Review* (AFR) in its Most Innovative Companies awards. UAC was also ranked 41st on the 2018 Most Innovative Companies list from over 1,000 nominated organisations across Australia and New Zealand.



# The 2010s

## Online applicant tools

While ATARs on the blockchain was a worthy headline grabber, digital transformation at UAC in the 2010s took many forms.

Earlier, in 2015, the MyUAC app had been launched.

It was followed by Course Compass in November 2018. Year 12 students could now view the top fields of study offered to previous applicants with similar results and HSC subjects. Drawing on UAC data from more than 110,000 applicants, the Course Compass model uses machine learning to find the hidden patterns between students' Year 12 subjects and the offers they receive. The aim is to help Year 12 students make better post-school decisions.

*The Sydney Morning Herald* wrote: 'Looking at what students with similar HSC courses have gone on to do at university could stop high school leavers from making the wrong choice, reduce attrition rates and raise scores.'

Subject Compass was launched in mid-2019. It aims to help Year 10 students choose their HSC subjects based on their interests, skills, personality traits, intended career path and tertiary study plans. Students are provided with suggested HSC subjects that match their profile. They can then select the subjects they are most keen on and check if that combination of subjects will make them eligible for an ATAR.

Students who already know the course they would like to study are alerted to the HSC subjects that are prerequisites or assumed knowledge for that course, ensuring they're well-prepared to apply for – and succeed in – their dream degree.



David Christie and Kim Paino  
at the AFR awards

## TAILORED SOLUTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS

### UAC Connect

Throughout the 2010s, ongoing competition for students meant that institutions were increasingly promoting their direct application pathways.

It became clear that an institution-branded UAC portal would give institutions the best of both worlds, with control of the application and access to UAC's assessment and systems expertise.

The first such portal was for UTS's Faculty of Business, motivated by their desire to improve the applicant experience while still retaining the direct relationship with them as they navigated the admissions process. For UAC this was an important step towards becoming more attuned to the needs of individual institutions.

The UTS portal was launched for 2012 mid-year admissions. In its first year it processed 684 applications and made 547 offers.

The system was fine-tuned and in 2015 launched formally as UAC Connect, a bespoke admissions solution, with Ross Walsh appointed head of Institutional Business.

Early adopters of Connect included the University of Western Sydney, CQUniversity and the University of New England, which launched portals to handle their undergraduate and postgraduate applications directly.

By 2018, more new partnerships were formed. Macquarie University's Global Leadership Program (now Leaders and Achievers) and Charles Sturt University's portal were launched as was the University of New England's Fast Track portal.

These were closely followed in 2019 by the University of Newcastle's Scholarships portal, the University of Wollongong's early admissions and Western Civilisation portals and a Fast Track portal for CQUniversity.

These were not the last of the developments realised in 2019. After UAC and the Australian National University had collaborated for almost two years to develop a portal that encompassed admissions, accommodation and scholarships, ANU ASA launched. This system was a milestone for UAC in that it integrated both UAC and ANU systems. In June of that year, the ANU international student application portal was launched, based on the redevelopment of UAC's international agents portal. This represented UAC Connect's first step into the broader international student sector.

By the new decade collaborations were underway with the Australian Catholic University, ACPE and the University of Tasmania, Connect's first interstate institution.

The 2010s had seen a fundamental shift in UAC's business. By the close of applications for semester 1

in the 2020–21 admissions period, UAC had processed 98,600 portal applications on behalf of its Connect partners. This was on top of the 81,600 unique undergraduate applications and 110,000 offers through its centralised admissions service.

### UAC Advance

Extending its value to institutions was a central part of UAC's mission.

UAC's institutions had identified credit management as one of their major pain points in the admissions process – for both institutions and students. After extensive consultation with institutions across the country, it was decided that a credit management solution for the tertiary education sector would be a viable product.

On the back of significant interest within the sector, the project moved into full development in 2019 – the first of its kind in Australia.

UAC Advance would begin to roll out in mid-2021, with Victoria University as launch partner. James Armit, Interim Executive Director (Students), Victoria University said: 'Our shared focus on technical innovation and user experience design will transform the student experience of applying for academic credit, reduce staff workload and help our staff manage precedents more efficiently.'

### UAC Insights

The development of UAC's data capabilities led to more new products in 2019: UAC Insights, a business intelligence tool for institutions to access a dashboard of live admissions information; and UAC Reach, a targeted marketing service for institutions and others seeking to engage with students.

In 2022, Insights would be extended to schools with the release of a dashboard displaying their students' UAC application information.

# The 2010s

## ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND GROWTH

This period of significant growth was soon reflected in UAC's staff numbers. In 2013, UAC had 63 permanent employees and 48 fixed-term temporary staff across four main areas: Corporate Services, Information Services, Client Services and Information Technology.

By 2020, UAC had 105 permanent employees and 66 fixed-term temporary and casual staff across six main areas: Business Analytics; People and Finance; Marketing and Engagement; Information Technology; Operations; and Business Solutions.

In the 2010s permanent staff had jumped 40 per cent and fixed-term staff by 30 per cent.

### Baton change

In June 2014, after 27 years at UAC, and nearly 19 as Managing Director, Andrew Stanton departed from UAC in what he described as a 'time for a change for both me and UAC'. While a search began for his replacement, Andrea Goodwin stepped in as Acting Managing Director.

In February 2015, Dr David Christie was appointed UAC's new Managing Director.



Andrew Stanton's farewell



### Business Solutions

As the management of institutional-branded portals grew, organisational changes were made to accommodate the new business.

UAC's Institutional Business division was formed in September 2016 and given strategic and operational responsibility for identifying, developing and coordinating the implementation of new business opportunities. In 2018 it was re-named Business Solutions, encompassing both account management and business development.

UAC's assessment team was separated into dedicated areas for centralised and Connect applications, acknowledging the growth and importance of this new business for UAC.

### Business Analytics

As illustrated by the development of UAC Insights and Reach, in the 2010s, data capability became central to UAC's business. In 2017, a new business area was created – Business Analytics – with its brief neatly encapsulated in the 2016–17 annual report: 'The effective use of data will drive analytical decision-making, strategy and business planning – both internally for UAC and externally for our institutions – and allow UAC to contribute insights to conversations about the higher education sector moving forward.'



### ON-BRAND



In the 2010s UAC continued to embrace new ways of delivering information and engaging with the public. In 2011, the UAC Facebook page was launched – a first step into social media – and was soon followed in 2012 by a YouTube channel and Twitter account. A LinkedIn account was set up in 2013 and later, in 2017, came Instagram.

To symbolise the wider transformation taking place, in early 2018 UAC unveiled a new brand strategy, including a refreshed logo, marking the most dramatic change to its visual identity in 13 years.

This strength of purpose was also reflected within the organisation, with a new set of organisational values incorporated into the strategic plan: Collaboration, Fairness, Innovation, Integrity and Passion. In the 2018–19 annual report, Andrew Parfitt, the chair of UAC's Board, stated that the values 'will act as guiding principles as UAC strives to meet the needs of new and existing higher education partners and prospective students'.

# The 2010s







## International delegations – sharing knowledge

Many overseas higher education authorities have visited UAC over the years. The visits were motivated by a keen interest to learn more about the UAC model of centralised admissions and the sharing of knowledge, as for many overseas jurisdictions all admissions are purely direct.

### **South Africa**

In March 1996, Commissioners from the South African National Commission on Higher Education visited UAC. It was only two years since the African National Congress had come to power and transformation of the education system was one of its key aims. Knowledge of Australian admissions systems would inform local reforms addressing fair and equitable access.

### **Malaysia**

In June 1996, UAC hosted delegates from the Malaysian Ministry of Education who were interested in learning more about different university admissions systems and practices. It was a period of regulatory reform in Malaysia, with the Malaysian Government enacting a number of acts of parliament covering secondary and tertiary education in 1996 and 1997. This relationship was extended in 2006 when the Malaysian Ministry and delegates from institutions paid a return visit to UAC.

### **New Zealand**

In September 2009, the manager of university admissions at the Auckland University of Technology enjoyed a full day's program at UAC, which covered the tertiary education environment and the general operations of UAC and its relationship with the universities. Significant changes were taking place in New Zealand's admissions operations at the time: where age or recognised school qualifications had previously automatically secured admission, new restrictions on places had led to more competitive selection processes.



In April 2011, UAC met with representatives from Unitec, New Zealand's largest institution of technology, to discuss UAC's approach to a centralised admissions process, as background to it and other New Zealand institutions considering establishing such a system. This was one of UAC's longer-standing relationships, with Unitec visiting again in 2013 and 2015.

### **International Association of Admissions Organisations**

UAC became the second host of the International Association of Admissions Organisations (IAAO) in April 2010, following a successful inaugural event launched by the United Kingdom in 2008. Delegates flew in from countries across the globe, including Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Netherland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The IAAO has met on numerous occasions, bringing together an international community of senior colleagues from centralised higher education admissions services to share a wealth of information and good practice related to the delivery of higher education admissions.

### **China**

UAC hosted a delegation from China in December 2011. Discussion focused on assessment practices.

### **Kuwait**

Representatives from the Kuwait Ministry of Education visited UAC in June 2012 to learn about UAC's approach to centralised processing of applications for admission to universities. At the time, there was a push in Kuwait to significantly widen access to university.

### **Philippines**

In June 2018, UAC met with a delegation from the Philippines and shared information about the ATAR and UAC's centralised university admissions system. There was also a focus on entry into teacher education courses.

### **Korea**

In February 2020, UAC hosted a delegation from Korea and provided an overview of operations and admissions in Australia. Information around selection ranks, the application process, application and offer numbers, timelines, and the ATAR, were of great interest.

# Case study













**2020s**

**2020**

Black summer bushfires throughout eastern Australia

Global health emergency declared as COVID-19 spreads

UAC staff begin working remotely in March

Launch of online information series, UAC Digital

**2021**

Final Australian troops leave Afghanistan as 20-year mission ends

NSW HSC students navigate delays to exams and ATAR release caused by pandemic disruptions

**2022**

UAC moves to new premises in Rhodes

# Chapter 7

## SUPPORTING LIFELONG LEARNING – THE 2020s AND BEYOND

UAC's second half-century began with the unpredicted, unprecedented and unfinished impact of COVID-19. UAC has shown itself to be adaptable and so, like businesses across the globe, it has learned to adapt to constantly changing health regulations and widespread economic uncertainty.

The agility and professionalism of UAC staff came to the fore as they quickly transitioned to working from home and communicating almost solely online. All areas of the business modified work practices to ensure services to institutions and applicants were maintained.

Despite the ongoing disruptions, UAC forged ahead with the development of a national credentials platform with the support of a grant from the Department of Education, Skills and Training. The platform is distinguished by its standardisation of credential information and the security it achieves through the application of distributed ledger technology. It has the potential to transform the way credential issuers, holders and verifiers operate and interact.

In 2022, UAC moved from its home of 20 years at Sydney Olympic Park to new office space nearby at Rhodes.

The move was a fitting step in UAC's evolution. It solidified new ways of working while continuing to provide trusted services to students and institutions. It also reflected UAC's transition to a provider of technological solutions that support the higher education sector and the pursuit of lifelong learning.

### STATE OF EMERGENCY

The start of the 2020s was unsettling, with unforeseen and unprecedented challenges within Australia and across the globe.

#### Black summer

In 2019, southern and eastern Australia experienced record low rainfall and high summer temperatures. It was Australia's driest and warmest year since records began. Dry vegetation affected by prolonged drought and low humidity, and fanned by strong winds, led to a series of cataclysmic bushfire events; the season was dubbed black summer.

By the end of March 2020, 5.5 million hectares of land had burned, and more than 2,400 homes had been destroyed in NSW alone. The impact on NSW communities, farmers, local businesses, wildlife and bushland was devastating.

Just as the country hoped to recover, another threat emerged.

#### COVID-19

A global health emergency was declared by the World Health Organization at the end of January 2020 when the highly infectious virus, COVID-19, began to spread. In February 2020, the NSW Government requested individuals and businesses take steps to prepare for a possible pandemic converging with the winter flu season.



Governments at all levels responded on the run to the unpredictable public health crisis, with daily press conferences becoming the norm. Over the next two years, schools and workplaces negotiated recurring lockdowns and extensive work-from-home directives. PCR tests, Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) and face masks became part of daily life.

International borders were closed and international students were unable to enter Australia. It quickly became evident that these students had become not only a sizeable export industry but were vital to many businesses in Australia, particularly as casual workers and as renters.



# The 2020s

## BUSINESS CONTINUITY

The sudden arrival of COVID-19 forced all businesses to pivot quickly, and UAC was no exception.

On 24 March 2020, David Christie sent the following email to staff:

**'Following the recent advice of the Australian Government to impose restrictions on non-essential services to contain the spread of infection, the executive have decided to implement WFH [work-from-home] arrangements for as many staff as possible. UAC's usual operations remain in place and we will continue to deliver our services, albeit in a different way to which we might have become accustomed.'**

After more than six months at home, UAC staff were able to return to the Sydney Olympic Park office in September and October 2020, but a fresh outbreak in June 2021 saw everyone working from home again. While UAC's history had shown an ability to adapt to changing times, the 2020s was already testing that afresh. Microsoft Teams – software few had heard of before 2020 – became an essential part of the workday.

### Public reassurance

Particularly in the early days of the pandemic, UAC was kept busy reassuring institutions and applicants that admissions would proceed, and that no applicant would be disadvantaged.

At the end of March, UAC assured Year 12 students that the ATAR would be calculated for 2020 NSW HSC students. The media release stated: 'UAC will be

working closely with universities, NESA and schools in the coming weeks and months to consider the impact of potential changes to the HSC on the ATAR and university admissions.'

As the pandemic continued, UAC continued to update and reassure Year 12 students, parents and schools through direct emails and greater use of social media.

### Online engagement

UAC's Marketing and Engagement team began a program of live-streamed sessions on Facebook and Instagram and launched a new online information service, UAC Digital, to maintain engagement with potential applicants, parents, careers advisers, teachers and universities.

## ADMISSION ADJUSTMENTS

It was soon apparent that all of Australia was intent on supporting Year 12 students as they grappled with remote schooling and uncertainty about their futures. A statement from ACTAC on 3 April 2020 described the times as 'extraordinary' and urged 'Year 12 students and others aspiring to further study to remain committed to their goals and be confident that all state and national education bodies were working on an equitable way forward that maintains the integrity of tertiary admissions'.

### Educational Access Scheme expanded

Responses in these extraordinary times needed to be multifaceted. In April 2020, UAC announced a new disadvantage under the Educational Access Scheme for those impacted by natural disasters, and in May 2020 two new disadvantages were added to help students whose families were disadvantaged financially by the impact of COVID-19.

### Early offers

To counteract the uncertainty and anxiety caused by COVID-19, Year 12 students grasped the opportunity to apply for an early offer to university. When the Schools Recommendation Scheme closed in September 2020, UAC had received more than 23,000 applications, a 45 per cent increase on the previous year. As a result, more than 15,400 offers were made in the early offer round in November – a record number compared to the 11,500 offers made the previous year.

The trend continued the following year, with UAC processing 25,478 Schools Recommendation Scheme applications.

In a statement to the media, General Manager of Marketing and Engagement Kim Paino said: 'I hope these offers are good news for all those HSC students currently in the midst of their final exams. It's been such a challenging year for them, but they're almost there and having an early offer could give them some extra momentum as they finish Year 12 and look forward to their future after school'.

### ATAR 2020

NESA announced a full-time return to the classroom for students from the end of May 2020 and a small change to the HSC timetable: it would start five days later than usual on 20 October, to give students extra time after the spring holiday period, while maintaining the original timeframe for releasing results.

As a result, UAC moved the ATAR release date from Tuesday 15 December to Friday 18 December, and December Round 2 offers from Monday 21 December to Wednesday 23 December.

Given the ongoing threat of COVID-19 disruptions, the Research and Data Science team made preparations to calculate the 2020 ATAR in a remote work environment, including making the entire ATAR calculation paperless.

### ATAR 2021

At the end of July 2021, NESA announced a week's delay to the HSC written exams to give students more time to prepare. The release of HSC results was also put back one week. As a result, UAC announced that the ATAR would also be released later, on 17 December instead of 15 December, and changes were made to December Round 2 dates.

However, as infection numbers soared the lockdown continued and Year 12 students had still not returned to the classroom. In August 2021, further delays to the NSW HSC examinations were announced, with results now postponed until January 2022; for the first time in many years Year 12 students would have to wait until after Christmas for their results and offers.

While not ideal, it was a recognition of the importance of completing Year 12 exams. Paino expressed UAC's support for the changes in a media release: 'We are pleased that today's announcement provides greater certainty for students and parents who are understandably anxious about completion of Year 12 and what it means for entry into university next year.'

## ROBUST APPLICATIONS

Demand for higher education remained strong among domestic students during the pandemic, with the uncertainty, poor prospects for work and travel, and a captive market at home on their computers all leading to a record number applying when applications opened in 2020. After just a few days, UAC had received more than 3,300 applications for undergraduate study, an increase of more than 100 per cent on the previous year. This included more than 2,500 Year 12 students, a 280 per cent increase on the same time last year, showing the confidence they had in pushing forward with their plans for 2021 despite COVID-19.

# The 2020s

By the end of the admissions period, UAC had received 81,600 applications for undergraduate admission, up 6.9 per cent from the previous year.

While centralised application numbers dropped 4 per cent the following year as things normalised, direct applications continued to grow. Overall, more than 180,000 applications were processed in 2021–22.

## SUPPORT FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

While the higher education sector dealt with the ongoing social and financial challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, UAC maintained a steady path, focusing on the development of key new projects using credentials technology.

### CredNet

UAC's innovative mindset and deepening relationship with government was evidenced in 2020 with the awarding of a grant to build a national credentials platform in collaboration with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and Higher Ed Services.

Underpinned by an agreed standards and taxonomy framework, the new platform will support a unified and transparent credential ecosystem that serves the interests of learners, the education sector, government and other stakeholders.

### MicroCred Seeker

In July 2021, UAC secured a Department of Education, Skills and Employment grant to build the nation's first ever marketplace for microcredentials.

David Christie said: 'This project is the next important step towards a comprehensive national framework for information about and access to all kinds of education credentials. UAC is proud to be working with the Australian Government and playing our part to further skill development and lifelong learning for all Australians.'

To be called MicroCred Seeker, the user-friendly website will allow users to compare short courses and help them understand how they can be stacked and used for credit towards a complete qualification.

## DATA SECURITY

As part of UAC's commitment to providing secure and robust services to all stakeholders, in December 2020, it gained accreditation for ISO (International Standards Organisation) 27001:201, an internationally accepted standard of information security practices. The certification recognises that UAC applies best-practice information security to the protection and handling all of its data.

## SERVICE MANAGEMENT

By 2021, UAC was dealing with institutions through its Connect portals and centralised services. As the management of these clients grew and became more complex, a Service Management Office was established and a service desk introduced to streamline and document workflows internally and externally.



### THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

UAC's recently formed Data Analytics team began to make significant research contributions to the sector in the 2020s.

A report analysing the impact of senior secondary subject choices on success at university was published in April 2020, followed by a report on the impact of student disadvantage on success at university in September 2021.

UAC also launched its inaugural Student Lifestyle Report in mid-2021. Thousands of Year 12 students gave insights into their hopes, dreams, habits and leisure activities. Published on an annual basis, the survey results are used to improve UAC services and provide new and innovative tools for applicants and institutions.

### A NEW WAY OF WORKING

At the end of January 2022, after delayed bargaining due to the pandemic, a new Enterprise Agreement for staff was approved by the Fair Work Commission.

After nearly two years of working from home or occasional attendance at the office, flexibility was the new normal and the enterprise agreement formalised new ways of working.

A hybrid model of working was introduced: staff could work some days from home and some days in the office.

The organisation also transitioned from the longstanding rostered-day-off system to a flexitime system. Staff would have flexibility to work their ordinary hours between 7am and 7pm.

### ON THE MOVE

UAC's lease at Sydney Olympic Park expired in March 2022. Staff briefly returned to the office to pack up their desks – almost 20 years to the day since UAC had arrived.

New premises were found nearby at 3 Rider Avenue, Rhodes, with a layout designed to reflect the new way of working. Desks could be shared and meeting and collaborative spaces were given priority.

Staff continued to work remotely until the new office was opened in late August 2022.

### A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

For more than 50 years, UAC has been a trusted partner to tertiary institutions. UAC exists because it makes the process of accessing higher education easier for students and it gives that process the integrity and efficiency that its partners and the community demand.

As it progresses through the 2020s, UAC plans to reinforce its market-leading position in university admissions, extend its capabilities, and become a leader in technology and services that make participation in lifelong learning easier for all.

# The 2020s





Crystal Palace Arcade  
590 George Street, Sydney



Challis House,  
Martin Place, Sydney

## UAC's homes

### **A new home**

In 1968 the Metropolitan Universities Admissions Centre (MUAC) was formed as a sub-committee of the registrars of the three participating universities: the University of Sydney, the University of NSW and Macquarie University. It was soon time to find office space for this important new function.

The campuses of all three universities were deemed inappropriate and the CBD was flagged as the ideal location for applicants to access.

### **Life in the city**

The Crystal Palace Arcade at 590 George Street, Sydney, became the Centre's first dedicated office. It was staffed and financed by the three participating institutions. Each university provided two staff who were responsible to the registrars.

The Centre enjoyed a one-year lease on the first floor of the arcade to the right of the former Crystal Palace Picture Theatre. The building is no longer there – it was demolished in the early 1980s to make way for the Cooper's and Lybrand Building.

The office fit-out was utilitarian with examination-type tables supplied by the University of NSW and other office furniture borrowed from Macquarie and Sydney universities.

Three punching machines and two verifying machines were borrowed and a photocopier was hired. An eight-line rotary switchboard was installed with five incoming lines.

It was a successful first year for MUAC. A review recommended hiring permanent staff and finding a more suitable office for the operation. MUAC moved to Wentworth Avenue, near Liverpool Street.



## **A growing operation**

As MUAC grew, Wentworth Avenue became more and more unsuitable: hot in the summer, with a small lift and difficult access for both delivery drivers and visitors.

New permanent staff members were hired in 1974 and in late 1975 MUAC was on the move again, this time to Surry Hills.

Bellevue Street, Surry Hills was home to MUAC for the next three years but with a proposed 30 per cent rent increase in August 1978, it was again time to look for a new home.

The University of Sydney owned House in Martin Place and MUAC moved in quickly. It was in a fantastic location in the heart of the CBD, very convenient for applicants and staff but again suffering from those city problems – no loading zones for sending out all important materials to high schools and difficult access for delivery drivers.

As a result, there were two more moves for MUAC before settling further west. First was a full circle move back to George Street in 1984 and then a quick relocation to Harris Street in Ultimo in 1985.

## **UCAC moves west**

The removalists had not long unpacked in Harris Street when a move further to the outskirts of Sydney was mooted. In 1987, UCAC took up residence in the Cumberland College of Health Sciences.

Former Managing Director Andrew Stanton coordinated the move: 'The Management Committee of the time felt that there could be some benefits to be gained by locating UCAC on the campus of a participating institution so, when Cumberland College offered to accommodate UCAC, the Management Committee grabbed the opportunity. Cumberland College felt, I think, that this would help raise the relatively new college's profile.'

1989 saw a move to another building on Cumberland College Campus, then in 1992 UCAC settled in its Auburn office for the next 10 years. Firaz Osman, UAC's Systems Manager remembers the community feel during on-time

applications closing in September every year: 'We used to love calling the Auburn Loins Club to come and do the sausage sizzle on the closing date of applications.'

## **A long-term home for UAC**

After 10 happy years at Auburn, continued growth meant that the building was no longer a good fit. Meanwhile, the 2000 Summer Olympic Games brought with it a whole new suburb – Olympic Park – with a raft of new office developments appearing once the Games were over. Only a short hop from the Auburn premises, UAC moved into the new purpose-built offices at Olympic Park in 2002.

Customer service was located on the ground floor, finance and human resources occupied part of the second floor and all other staff filled the first floor.

## **On the move**

After 20 years at Olympic Park, UAC had outgrown the premises. Several office re-organisations and letting of new space in the building came to a halt with COVID-19 and the move to hybrid working.

In early 2022 the company leased new premises again, just a stone's throw away at Rhodes.

The modern, new premises were fitted out with flexibility and collaboration in mind to take UAC into the next phase of its growth.

# Case study











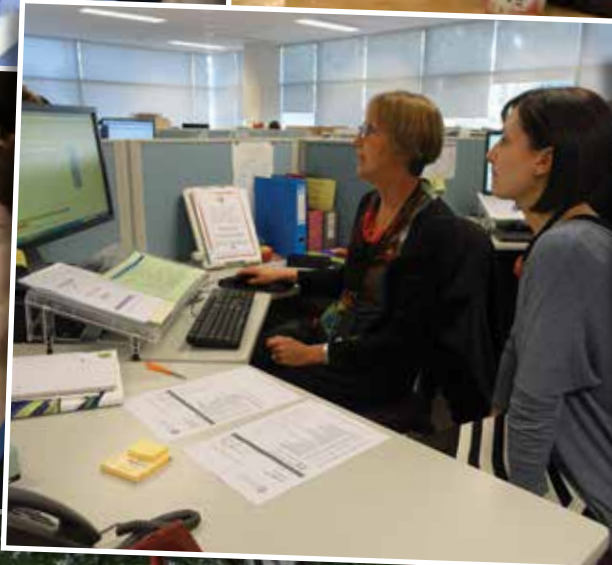






















## Research

Thank you to the institutions who assisted with the research for this publication: Macquarie University archives, University of Sydney archives, UNSW archives and UTS University Records. Thank you also to the librarians of the State Library of NSW for their assistance.

Thank you to the staff of UAC, past and present, who shared their memories and stories and who checked earlier versions of the text.

Much of the historical selection aggregates information came from George Cooney's publication 'A brief history of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank in New South Wales' (unpublished), May 2015.

## Images

Cover, inside front cover: Crystal Palace Arcade, 590 George Street, Sydney, courtesy NSW Police Forensic Photography Archive, Justice and Police Museum, Sydney Living Museums.

### Chapter 1

CSIRO Parkes radio telescope, Murriyang, 1965, courtesy CSIRO.

Prime Minister Robert Menzies during election campaign, Perth, 1963 © Commonwealth of Australia (National Archives of Australia) 2019.

Fisher Library Stack under construction, 1966, courtesy University of Sydney Archives, G3\_224\_0095.

Macquarie University under construction, 1967, courtesy Macquarie University Archives.

Students reading in Fisher Library (McLaurin Hall), 1950, courtesy University of Sydney Archives, G3\_224\_1273\_2.

Newspaper advertisement promoting the establishment of the Metropolitan Universities Admissions Centre, 1 November 1968, courtesy *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

'Lure of learning', 10 January 1969, courtesy News Ltd/NewsPix.

### Chapter 2

Construction of the Opera House, National Archives of Australia, 1969 © Commonwealth of Australia (National Archives of Australia) 2019.

The Institute of Technology tower, photo John Vagg, courtesy David Vagg.

Students on campus, University of Sydney, 1974, courtesy University of Sydney Archives, G3\_224\_09331.

Students on library lawn, University of NSW, late 1960s, courtesy UNSW Archives.

Students on campus, University of NSW, early 1970s, courtesy UNSW Archives.

Students walking, University of NSW, c1970s, courtesy UNSW Archives.

### Chapter 3

Tall ships on Sydney Harbour celebrating Australia's Bicentenary, Australia Day, 1988 © Commonwealth of Australia (National Archives of Australia) 2019.

Students stick on tax protest, photo Anton Cermak, 3 June 1988, courtesy *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

'Magic number: the complex way each ATAR is conjured', Helen Tam, UAC Research Development and Statistics Manager, 2 June 2018, courtesy *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

'Axis of semi-evil', cartoon Sommerville, 11 February 2002, courtesy *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

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## Chapter 4

Crowds during Blink-182 performance at the first Big Day Out music festival, Australia Day, 1992, photo Paul Miller, courtesy *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

'Scars show through the facelift', illustration Ed Aragon, 3 September 1992, courtesy *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

Chris Monahas and Denise Tsirigotis, centre, at the University Admissions Centre making last-minute changes, 18 January 1995, courtesy *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

Class we failed, 8 January 1997, courtesy News Ltd/Newspix.

'Rejected student fights for university admission', 2 February 1992, courtesy *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

'Despair as unis turn away 48,000,' 31 January 1992, courtesy *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

## Chapter 5

The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games closing ceremony, 30 October 2000, courtesy *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

Emeritus Professor and former Vice-Chancellor Denise Bradley with Education Minister Julia Gillard at the launch of Bradley Review report into higher education, photo Rebecca Hallas, 18 December 2008, courtesy *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

'Don't waste your uni application', Andrew Stanton, UAC Managing Director, photo Angelo Soulas, 17 January 2001, courtesy News Ltd/Newspix.

## Chapter 6

Australia's first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, with Australia's first female Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, after the swearing-in ceremony, photo Kym Smith, 30 October 2010, courtesy News Ltd/Newspix.

## Chapter 7

Bulli High School students get a round of applause from teachers for their top HSC results after being affected by COVID-19 lockdowns for most of Year 12, photo Adam McLean, 23 March 2021, courtesy Illawarra Mercury/ACM.

All other images from the UAC archives.

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