

# ANNUAL REPORT

2018-19

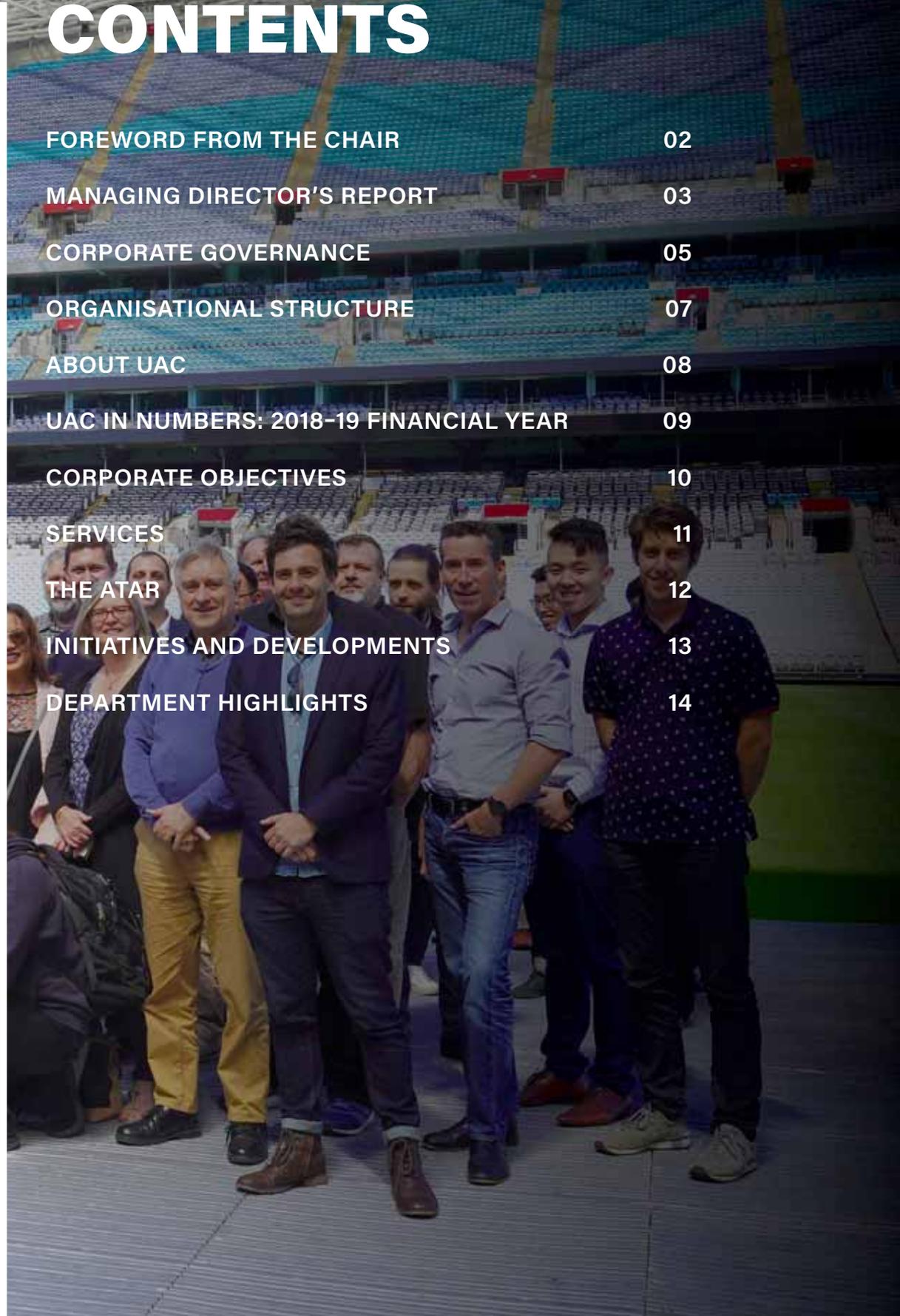


**UAC**



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# FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR



On behalf of the Board of Directors I have pleasure in presenting UAC's report on the 2018-19 financial year. I take this opportunity to thank retiring Deputy Chair Professor Caroline McMillen (Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle) for her service over the past 18 months and warmly welcome Deputy Chair Professor Grady Venville (Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Australian National University).

It has been a year of continued disruption of the higher education admissions model and ongoing change in the broad business environment. In response, UAC has worked towards a more assertive and commercial approach, with strategic areas of focus being business diversification, cultural change, customer service, innovation, and a national presence.

A refreshed UAC Strategic Plan 2019-2021 was released, reflecting recent decisions in relation to the direction of the company. While UAC has set about consolidating the core business of its centralised service, it is continuing to expand the UAC Connect bespoke service to meet the needs of institutions' growing direct application pathways. These activities have extended the capabilities of UAC, with the demand for new services offsetting the decline in applicant numbers through the central environment. The new strategic plan seeks to build on the growth of the bespoke solutions services, taking UAC to its next stage of providing new services and consolidating core admissions, all the while continuing to work with institutions to meet their needs.

The UAC Board approved funding for the purposes of pursuing new business directions. These new directions include the provision of academic credit management solutions (UAC Advance), data/insights services (UAC Insights), and service matching (UAC Reach). All initiatives are focused on supporting students and institutions during the early stages of the student experience.

There are exciting times ahead for UAC, and ones that bring new challenges. To that end, UAC's staff has developed a new set of organisational values that have been incorporated into the strategic plan: Collaboration, Fairness, Innovation, Integrity and Passion. These values will act as guiding principles as UAC strives to meet the needs of new and existing higher education partners and prospective students.

My sincere thanks to the members of the UAC Board for their skilled oversight of key strategic, financial and risk issues. The Board benefits greatly from the work of its actively engaged sub-committees – including the Nomination and Remuneration Committee, Audit Committee, and Business Development Committee – which bring deep consideration and robust governance to the decision-making process.

The Board and I appreciate the ongoing commitment of UAC staff to meeting the company's strategic objectives and facilitating access to higher education in Australia. UAC is well placed to maintain its leadership role in tertiary admissions.

## **Professor Andrew Parfitt**

Chair, UAC Board  
Provost and Senior Vice-President  
University of Technology Sydney

# MANAGING DIRECTOR'S REPORT



While the tertiary admissions landscape continued to shift in 2018-19, UAC maintained its unwavering support of the institutions that provide higher education, and the people who access it.

In the past year, UAC has strived to position itself as the leader in tertiary admissions and as an integral voice in the broader education context.

UAC continued its successful collaboration with the Commonwealth Government and other state-based tertiary admissions centres on the phased development of Course Seeker, the national admissions higher education information platform. Course Seeker provides prospective students with a single point of entry for information about admissions policies and processes for all undergraduate courses offered by Australian higher education institutions.

Collaboration was also key to the development of a new schedule to convert International Baccalaureate (IB) scores to UAC ranks. Following an analysis of data by UAC, the ATAR Technical Committee and experts from other Australian tertiary admissions centres, UAC developed a new schedule to convert IB scores for the purposes of admission. All Australian tertiary admissions centres have agreed to adopt the new schedule for 2022 admissions.

We were pleased to participate as members of the GAP Taskforce on Youth Transitions, which was established in October 2018 to contribute to the NSW Curriculum Review. The Taskforce explored school-to-work pathways and offered expert advice and specific recommendations to the NSW and Commonwealth Governments. UAC was particularly involved in discussions around the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

Internationally, there has been considerable momentum building regarding the use of digital credentials. UAC attended the Groningen Declaration Network's global conference in April 2019. The Network is a global convener of experts in the field of digital credentialing. As a signatory to the Network's agreement, UAC is committed to enabling the mobility of students and their credentials.

As a solutions-focused organisation, UAC was proud to be recognised for its achievements in technological innovation. UAC ranked 41st on the 2018 Most Innovative Companies list, published by *The Australian Financial Review*, from over 1,000 nominated organisations across Australia and New Zealand. We were also awarded Best Process Innovation for releasing ATAR documents to NSW HSC students using Ethereum blockchain technology. This technology was embedded in ATAR documents to allow self-verification of the credential, eliminating the potential for fraud.

UAC's innovation agenda was also evident in other technological achievements:

- *Course Compass*: Launched in November 2018, Course Compass is an online tool that allows recent Year 12 students to view the top fields of study offered to previous UAC applicants who have achieved similar results in similar HSC subjects. Drawing on 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 university course offers they received.
- *Subject Compass*: This online tool for Year 10 students was released in May 2019 to help them choose their HSC courses based on their interests, skills and personality traits, desired career path or planned tertiary course. Students are provided with suggested HSC subjects that match their profile. They are then given an indication of their eligibility for an ATAR based on their selected subjects.



- *Agent Access*: Our international agent portal launched in June 2019. This has been adopted by a major university client, with others to follow.
- *UAC Reach*: Work commenced on a new service-matching initiative, which involves the development of an advertising and analytics solution with the capability to target students and deliver relevant information about study options and related higher education products and services from partner organisations, including universities, other higher education providers and related third parties.
- *UAC Advance*: UAC's solution for the treatment and recognition of academic credit was favourably received and generated significant interest across the sector. We look forward to moving into the first phase of the Advance rollout with our institution partners.

These achievements, and all the progress outlined in this report, are the result of a collective effort from the UAC Board, management and staff. I appreciate their vision, creativity and integrity and thank them all. We enter the new financial year with energy, strength and confidence.

**Dr David Christie**

Managing Director, UAC



## CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

UAC's corporate governance framework enables the company to meet expectations of transparency, probity, accountability and integrity. It includes a compliance register which is formally reviewed by departments on an annual basis. UAC's risk management framework focuses on risk identification, risk mitigation and integrating risk management into business planning and operations.

The UAC Board is UAC's prime decision-making body. The Board determines UAC's strategies for operations and future development, and oversees risks, internal controls and regulatory activities.

The Board receives advice from:

- the executive team at UAC, which monitors the management and performance of UAC and provides advice on corporate and strategic issues as needed
- the Audit Committee, which provides independent assurance to the UAC Board on the adequacy of UAC's governance processes, financial reporting, risk management, control frameworks and external reporting obligations

- the Nomination and Remuneration Committee, which assists the UAC Board in discharging its responsibilities in relation to the selection, appointment and remuneration practices and performance evaluation of the Managing Director, UAC Board and Board committees
- the Business Development Committee, which assists the UAC Board in discharging its governance and fiduciary responsibilities in relation to the pursuit of business opportunities within the higher education sector.

UAC's external auditor is the Auditor-General of NSW. The Auditor-General provides an independent opinion on whether UAC's financial statements are true and fair and comply with applicable Australian Accounting Standards.

## UAC Board 2018-19

### Chair

#### **Professor Andrew Parfitt**

*Provost and Senior Vice-President  
University of Technology Sydney*

**Appointed August 2014**

**(Appointed Chair 1 July 2016)**

Professor Parfitt has had extensive experience across the higher education sector. Prior to his current position at UTS, he was Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at the University of Newcastle. He has also held positions as Pro Vice-Chancellor and Vice President: Division of IT, Engineering and the Environment at the University of South Australia, Director of the Institute for Telecommunications Research at the University of South Australia, CEO of the Cooperative Research Centre for Satellite Systems, General Manager of Space Programs in CSIRO and Associate Dean in the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Adelaide.

His area of academic expertise is telecommunications engineering. He is a Senior Member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) and a Fellow of Engineers Australia and has previously held adjunct academic appointments at Adelaide, Sydney and Macquarie universities.

Andrew is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and has been a member of many government, professional and industry boards and committees.

From 2010 to 2012 Andrew was a ministerial appointment to the Commonwealth Government's Space Industry Innovation Council.

Andrew has served on advisory committees to the Board of Studies, Teaching and Education Standards (now NES) in NSW and the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in the area of Initial Teacher Education.

### Other members

#### **Prof Caroline McMillen**

##### **Deputy Chair**

*Vice-Chancellor and President  
University of Newcastle*

Appointed January 2017

Retired October 2018

#### **Prof Grady Venville**

*Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)  
Australian National University*

Appointed January 2019

#### **Mr Damien Israel**

*Chief Finance Officer  
University of Wollongong*

Appointed July 2011

#### **Mr Scott Nichols**

*Director, Student Connect  
University of Canberra*

Appointed September 2014

#### **Professor Tyrone Carlin**

*Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)  
Southern Cross University*

Appointed January 2017

#### **Ms Nicole Grainger-Marsh**

*Consulting Services*

Appointed January 2016

#### **Ms Claire Hopkins**

*General Manager, Accredited Portfolio  
RMIT Online*

Appointed January 2016

#### **Mr Robert Chard**

*General Manager, Corporate and Enterprise/  
General Manager, ACT and Federal Government  
Konica Minolta*

Appointed January 2017

#### **Dr David Christie**

*Managing Director, UAC*

Appointed March 2015

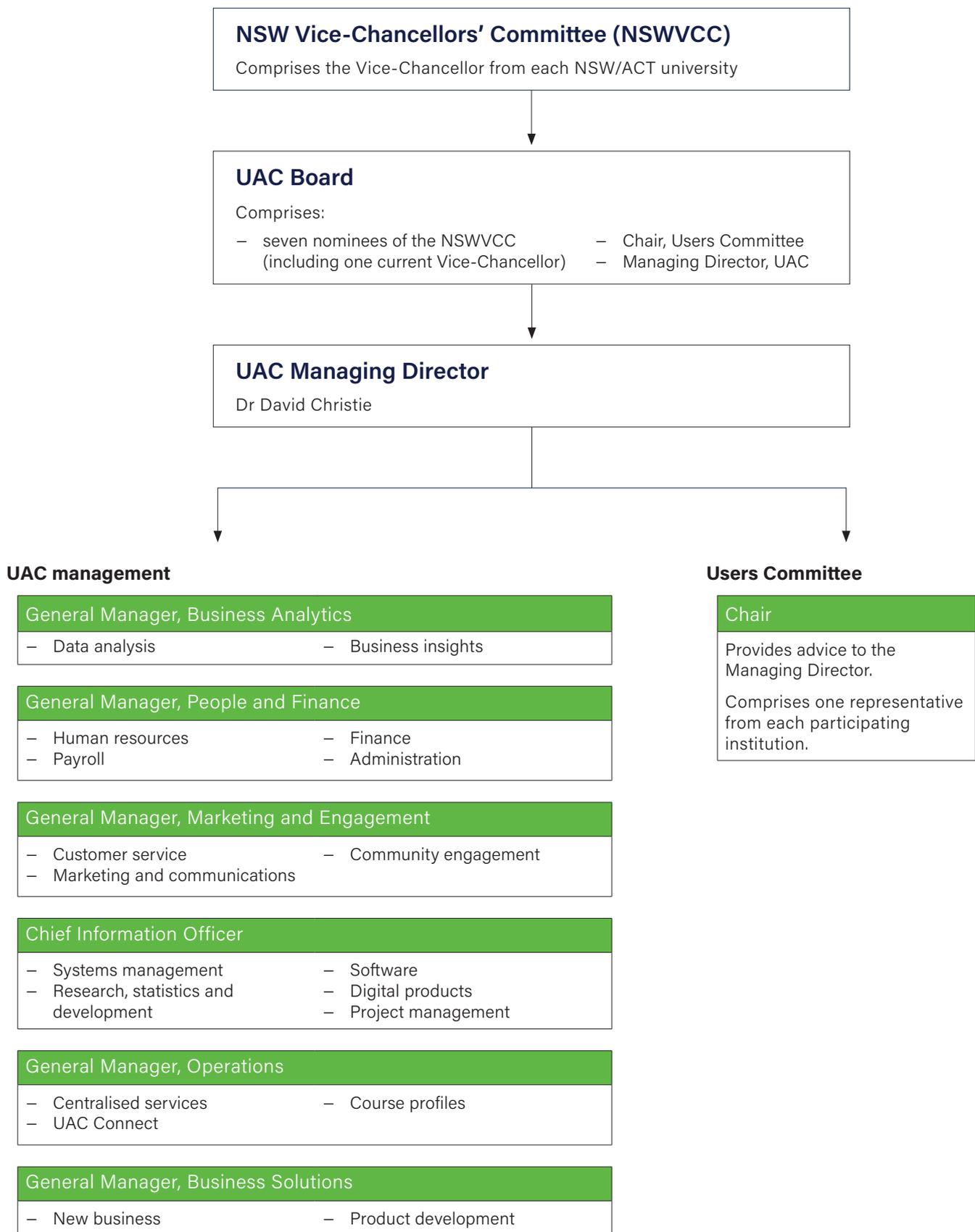
### Officer

#### **Mr Michael Berg**

*Company Secretary*

Appointed January 2018

# ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE





## ABOUT UAC

UAC – the Universities Admissions Centre – was established in 1995 and is the largest tertiary admissions centre in Australia. Owned by universities in NSW and the ACT, our mission is to provide excellence in admissions services and promote equity of access to tertiary education. Central to that mission is our belief in the value of education and our commitment to providing opportunities in higher education for all members of our community. We are not-for-profit and driven by a strong culture of servicing the needs of our stakeholders.

## INSTITUTIONS FOR 2018-19

### Participating

In the 2018-19 admissions period, UAC worked with 27 participating institutions, which together offered more than 2,200 courses.

UAC's participating institutions were:

- Australian Catholic University
- Australian College of Applied Psychology
- Australian Maritime College
- Australian National University
- Charles Sturt University
- CQUniversity
- Griffith University
- International College of Management, Sydney
- La Trobe University
- Macleay College
- Macquarie University
- MIT Sydney
- National Art School
- SAE Creative Media Institute
- SIBT
- Southern Cross University
- Top Education Institute
- Torrens University Australia
- University of Canberra

- University of New England
- University of Newcastle
- University of Sydney
- University of Technology Sydney
- University of Wollongong
- UNSW Sydney
- UNSW Canberra at ADFA
- Western Sydney University

### Apply direct

UAC publishes general information and course listings for other approved higher education providers. This information appears in the UAC Guide and on UAC's website, but applications to the courses are not processed or assessed by UAC. Applicants apply directly to these institutions.

In the 2018-19 admissions period, UAC worked with 11 apply direct institutions. These were:

- Academy of Information Technology
- Academy of Interactive Entertainment
- Academy of Music and Performing Arts
- Alphacrucis College
- Australian College of Physical Education
- Australian Film Television and Radio School
- Endeavour College of Natural Health
- JMC Academy
- National Institute of Dramatic Art
- The University of Notre Dame Australia
- Wentworth Institute.

## MANAGEMENT

UAC's major policies are determined by the UAC Board, which reports to the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee. The day-to-day activities of UAC are the responsibility of the Managing Director. UAC's management structure and relationships are set out on page 07.

# UAC IN NUMBERS: 2018-19 FINANCIAL YEAR

Participating institutions



Apply direct institutions



ATAR Advice Notices generated



## Undergraduate



Courses offered



Domestic applications



Domestic offers



International applications



International offers



## Postgraduate



Courses offered



Domestic applications



Domestic offers



## Equity



Equity Scholarship applications



Equity Scholarships offered



Educational Access Scheme applications



Schools Recommendation Schemes applications



## Customer Service



Students, teachers, careers advisers and parents reached through community engagement



Phone calls



Emails



Social media engagements



## Qualifications Assessment Service



People assessed



## UAC Connect Applications

August 2018 to March 2019





## CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

### STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-21

The UAC Strategic Plan 2019–2021 builds on over 30 years of developing and providing robust, innovative and flexible processes and systems to support admission into higher education. The outsourcing of admissions processes to UAC has been both efficient and expedient for universities, enabling them to focus upon their core capabilities of learning and teaching, research and external engagement. It has also been better for prospective students, especially Year 12s, providing them with an easy access point to thousands of course options.

In the last decade there has been a decline in the centralised admissions service as universities have taken more direct admissions. In that time UAC has evolved its bespoke solutions business to meet the needs of institutions and it now represents a third of our applications processed.

The UAC Strategic Plan 2019–2021 seeks to build on that success to take UAC to the next stage of growth, provide new services, consolidate our core and continue to work with institutions to meet their needs.

### OUR MISSION

To be at the forefront of access to higher education.

### OUR VISION

To be the pre-eminent provider of admission-related services to education institutions and their prospective students.

### OUR VALUES

- Collaboration
- Fairness
- Innovation
- Integrity
- Passion

### OUR GOALS

1. Help school leavers access higher education.
2. Provide bespoke services for institutions.
3. Innovate to add value and efficiency.
4. Position UAC as the leader in admissions.
5. Diversify our business.

# SERVICES

## **Undergraduate admissions**

UAC administers undergraduate admissions for domestic and selected international applicants. This includes a centralised application and assessment process; management of the allocation process; and the provision of associated resources, information and services for applicants, potential applicants, other interested parties and the general public.

## **Postgraduate admissions**

UAC administers postgraduate admissions for selected coursework courses for domestic applicants. This includes the provision of a centralised application and assessment process; management of the allocation process; and the provision of associated resources, information and services for applicants, potential applicants, other interested parties and the general public.

## **Australian Tertiary Admission Rank**

UAC manages the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), including website release, distribution of ATAR Advice Notices, management of the ATAR Enquiry Centre and the provision of associated resources for students, teachers, parents and the general public.

## **Qualifications Assessment Service**

UAC's online Qualifications Assessment Service (QAS) allows potential applicants to have their qualifications assessed before they apply for tertiary study.

## **Equity scheme management**

### **Educational Access Schemes**

Most of UAC's participating institutions offer Educational Access Schemes (EAS) to help students who have experienced long-term educational disadvantage gain admission to tertiary study. UAC administers all EAS applications on behalf of institutions, including the provision of centralised applications and assessment, the distribution of eligibility letters and the provision of associated resources, information and services.

## **Equity Scholarships**

Equity Scholarships help financially disadvantaged students with the costs associated with tertiary study. UAC administers Equity Scholarships for UAC applicants and current university students, including the provision of centralised applications and assessment, offer processes and the provision of associated publications, information and services.

## **Schools Recommendation Schemes**

Schools Recommendation Schemes (SRS) are one way institutions make early offers to current Australian Year 12 students who have applied for undergraduate admission through UAC. SRS applications are assessed centrally at UAC using criteria other than (or in addition to) the ATAR, including school recommendations and senior secondary studies.

## **UAC Connect**

UAC Connect is a bespoke admissions solution that provides full coverage of the admissions process from application to offer generation. It involves the integration of three key systems currently servicing undergraduate, postgraduate and international admissions: online application, expert management functionality and data warehouse.



## THE ATAR

Each year more than 55,000 school leavers apply through UAC for admission to courses offered by universities in NSW and the ACT. For the majority of courses there are more applicants than places. Applicants must be ranked to allow selection to take place.

This ranking is determined by the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

The ATAR provides a measure of a student's overall academic achievement in relation to that of other students and helps universities rank applicants for selection into their courses. The ATAR is a rank, not a mark. It is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 and indicates a student's position relative to the same age cohort.

The ATAR is calculated solely for use by tertiary institutions, either on its own or in conjunction with other criteria.

Calculation of the ATAR is the responsibility of the Technical Committee on Scaling on behalf of the New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee. The NSW Education Standards Authority provides the HSC data from which the ATARs are calculated. The Technical Committee on Scaling is responsible for translating policy decisions into processes, and for developing and maintaining programs that ensure the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the individual ATARs.

ATARS are distributed to students by UAC, which also handles enquiries from students through its ATAR Enquiry Centre and customer contact centre following the release of the results. UAC also holds ATAR information sessions and distributes information about the ATAR to schools during the year.

ATARs were released on Friday 14 December 2018 to 56,127 students. Following this, UAC provided support to thousands of students via the ATAR Enquiry Centre, the customer contact centre and social media. The Marketing and Engagement team also responded to enquiries from all major media outlets.

The median ATAR for 2018 was 69.65, slightly higher than in 2017. The median ATAR for females was 71.10 and the median ATAR for males was 67.80. More than 49 per cent of students received an ATAR of 70.00 or above.

The Technical Committee on Scaling produces an annual report on the scaling of the NSW Higher School Certificate. These reports can be found on UAC's website at [uac.edu.au/scalingreports](http://uac.edu.au/scalingreports).

# INITIATIVES AND DEVELOPMENTS

## CHANGE TO UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS YEAR

In response to a request from institutions, UAC opened undergraduate applications in April 2019, rather than August. As a result, the 2018–19 admissions year was shorter, running from August 2018 to March 2019, rather than July. The aim of the earlier opening date was to help institutions accommodate trimester calendars and give Year 12 students and schools more time to complete Schools Recommendation Scheme and Educational Access Scheme applications.

## COURSE COMPASS

UAC deployed the latest cutting-edge technology to launch a new course finder platform for Year 12 students. Launched in November 2018, Course Compass was developed using machine learning techniques based on neural network modelling – a simplified model of the way the human brain processes information. The model was trained using data from more than 110,000 recent UAC applicants and has learnt the hidden patterns between students' Year 12 subjects and the university course offers they received. Students can enter their HSC course marks and ATAR to find out what paths have been taken by others with similar results.

## SUBJECT COMPASS

UAC developed the Subject Compass online tool to help Year 10 students choose their HSC subjects based on their interests, skills, personality traits, intended career path or tertiary study plans. Launched in May 2019, Subject Compass is based on a discrete database derived from information in UAC's highly successful *Steps to Uni for Year 10 Students* booklet, which has been used in schools for many years.

## UAC ADVANCE

Extensive research and development work was carried out on UAC's credit management solution, UAC Advance, which is scheduled for deployment as a pilot project in 2020. To develop an effective credit management system, UAC engaged with two-thirds of Australia's higher education sector. In addition, business management consultancy Nous Group carried out in-depth research with a sample group.

## UAC CONNECT

In addition to implementing rolling admissions this year, UAC Connect continued to expand its client base.

### Australian National University

Following nearly two years of close collaboration between UAC and the Australian National University, UAC Connect launched ANU ASA (admissions, scholarships and accommodation for domestic undergraduate applicants) in March 2019. The power of the new system lies in its integration: both UAC and ANU systems work seamlessly, enabling live data exchange and synchronisation of student information.

In June 2019, the ANU international student application portal was launched, representing UAC's first steps into the broader international student sector.

### University of Wollongong

New portals for applications to the University of Wollongong Early Admission scheme (for Year 12 students) and the Bachelor of Arts in Western Civilisation were developed in preparation for launch in July 2019.

## COURSE SEEKER

UAC played a leading role in the development and project management of the Commonwealth Government's new Course Seeker website. Course Seeker helps students make informed decisions about future study by providing access to transparent information on ATARs/OPs, prerequisites and enrolment policies. Information is sourced from across Australia and presented in a nationally consistent and comparable format to improve the transparency across the higher education sector. The platform was a recommendation of the Higher Education Standards Panel in its *Improving the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions* report released in October 2016. The Panel recommended that a new website be established to provide a single point of entry for information about higher education admissions policies and processes across higher education providers.

# DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

## PEOPLE AND FINANCE



### Tim Gleeson

General Manager, People and Finance

The People and Finance department undertakes the resourcing and risk management responsibilities of UAC. We provide a range of services to help meet the organisation's financial, corporate, staffing, training, statutory, governance and risk management responsibilities.

### Finance

The Finance unit has a diverse range of responsibilities. We provide fiscal and statutory reporting, financial budgeting and audit, management of purchasing and procurement, compliance with legislative and governance requirements, oversight of building maintenance, assessment of risk, insurance and legal matters, and policy development for the organisation.

The unit provides key information to the UAC Board and its sub-committees.

During the year we improved our month-end reporting to include project costings that allow better oversight and control of expenditure. With faster reporting turnaround, key decision makers now have better information delivered more quickly to provide valuable insight into business performance.

### People and Culture

The People and Culture unit provides advice and guidance to the organisation on a range of key matters. These include recruitment, engagement, training and development, industrial relations and compliance, and payroll activities.

During 2018-19 UAC operated with 87 permanent employees, and 52 fixed-term temporary and casual staff. This represents a 19 per cent increase in staff numbers during the year and supports UAC's strategic goals to develop innovative business solutions for the ever-changing higher education sector.

One of the many challenges with this level of growth has been ensuring that everyone is aware of their priorities and the role that other departments play in providing the best level of service for our customers. Accordingly, we have improved our induction processes to provide the best start possible for new employees. This is supplemented with a 'buddy' system, formal training opportunities and information sessions for staff to provide demonstrations to their colleagues around our latest developments. It allows new recruits to come up to speed quickly and contribute to the ongoing success of UAC and its customers.

We also revisited our values during the year to further strengthen our company culture and to maintain a personal alignment between each employee and the business. As a result, we refined our five values through a series of staff workshops and produced sets of behaviours and actions that embed our values in our day-to-day actions and discussions.

In combination with our investment in management training and increasing opportunities for development, our staff are provided with the personal and technical skills to succeed within a culture of support and recognition of achievement. This has been one of the critical aspects of our staffing strategy throughout the year and alignment of these values and opportunities will continue to play a major role in our success over the coming years.

## BUSINESS SOLUTIONS



**James Kevin**

General Manager, Business Solutions

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Expansion of UAC's markets, client base and suite of services was the hallmark of the year for Business Solutions, leading to the division once again overachieving its revenue targets in a sustainable manner.

The significance of UAC Connect (white label online portal) continued to grow, with the service processing over 56,000 applications (almost 40 per cent of total applications).

Two new clients joined the UAC Connect stable:

- The Australian National University's ASA (admissions, scholarships and accommodation) program is the first initiative of its kind to integrate scholarships and accommodation with the application process. It is also integrated with the university's systems via APIs.
- The University of Wollongong's Early Admissions scheme includes a purpose-built online interview booking system. Application volumes subsequently increased by more than 50 per cent. Applications for the University's new Western Civilisation offering are also underpinned by UAC Connect.

UAC has also entered the market for inbound international students, launching Agent Access, a university-agnostic online portal through which education agents can lodge and manage applications. The portal is integrated with UAC's full assessment service and applicant management back-end.

ANU became the first Agent Access client, signing a multi-year agreement, and is processing applications for semester 1, 2020 via the portal.

Business Solutions also introduced two marketing-based services that use student data to help institutions identify and connect with prospective students:

- Fast Track – a targeted push solution that personalises and automates the application/offer process
- EDM (electronic direct mail) campaigns – a precursor to the Reach program (launch date of August 2019).

## OPERATIONS



**Nerida Bewick**

General Manager, Operations

Operations is UAC's largest division, comprising the Course Profiles, Assessment (Centralised and Connect) and Access units. It is responsible for a range of functions, including maintaining course profiles through the collection of course-related information from UAC's institutions, assessment of applications for admission, Equity Scholarships and Educational Access Schemes. Operations manages data in all three of UAC's centralised environments: undergraduate, international and postgraduate, as well as for all Connect clients.

### Assessment

When an applicant applies for study through UAC, their qualifications are assessed as part of UAC's standard processing service to our institutions.

While selection of Year 12 applicants for tertiary study is usually ATAR-based and assessment is straightforward, non-Year 12s (those who have not completed their Year 12 qualification in the current school year) may be assessed on, for example, professional qualifications, work experience or previous tertiary study. Applicants with international qualifications are assessed using schedules developed by benchmarking each country's secondary qualification standards against the NSW HSC and ATAR.

UAC also assesses specific eligibility criteria; for example, whether an applicant meets course prerequisites or English language proficiency requirements.

To ensure UAC's assessments are fair and equitable for all applicants, staff stay abreast of educational reforms in Australia and around the world.

### Centralised services

The 2018-19 undergraduate and international admissions year opened on 1 August 2018 and closed on 8 February 2019 (a shorter duration than the previous admissions year). Figures reported in the following undergraduate, international and access sections relate to this admissions period, not the financial year.

### Undergraduate

In 2018-19, UAC received 75,376 applications for undergraduate admission. Compared to the same period in the previous admissions year, there were 3,366 (4.3 per cent) fewer applications received. This decline is partially explained by changes in admissions practices at some of our institutions, which have resulted in more direct admissions and a general flattening of the market.

The decline in applications had a minor impact on offer volumes. Over 101,265 offers were generated and the largest offer round was December Round 2. The recent pattern of growth in offers to pathway courses continued.

### Postgraduate

The 2018-19 postgraduate admissions year remained the same as the previous year, closing on 23 August 2019. UAC received 5,674 applications for postgraduate admission – a decrease of 26.2 per cent from the previous year. Offers also decreased, with 5,842 offers made. This decline is also partially explained by changes in admissions practices at some of our institutions, resulting in more direct admissions.

### International

UAC accepts applications from a particular group of international students – those who have completed an Australian Year 12, International Baccalaureate, or New Zealand NCEA. In 2018-19, UAC received 3,172 applications from international students, an increase of 4.9 per cent from the previous year.

### Access

On behalf of participating institutions, UAC's Access unit manages programs addressing access to, and participation in, tertiary study for disadvantaged students. The Commonwealth Scholarships Program, in particular, supports eligible Indigenous students with the general costs of study and/or accommodation.

## **Educational Access Schemes**

Educational Access Schemes (EAS) help students who have experienced long-term educational disadvantage gain admission to tertiary study.

To be eligible for EAS consideration, a student's educational performance must have been seriously affected, normally for a period of at least six months during Year 11 and 12 or equivalent, due to circumstances beyond their control and choosing.

UAC processes EAS applications for undergraduate applicants through UAC. Electronic or 'virtual' EAS applications are generated for current Year 12 students who have applied for undergraduate admission and who attended a school in the School Environment category in Year 12. The School Environment category targets predominantly low-socio-economic status schools and schools located in rural and regional Australia.

In 2018–19, UAC received 20,037 EAS applications, 10,894 of which were received from students and 9,143 of which were automatically generated. This is a slight increase on the total applications received in the previous year, but a large increase (34 per cent) on applications submitted by applicants.

This increase is due, at least in-part, to EAS launching as an online application, replacing paper applications and posted documentation.

## **Equity Scholarships**

Equity Scholarships help financially disadvantaged undergraduate and postgraduate students with the costs associated with higher education.

Equity Scholarships through UAC comprise:

- Indigenous Commonwealth Scholarships funded by the Australian Government
- Institution Equity Scholarships funded by individual universities, donations or sponsorship.

During 2018–19, UAC received 8,998 Equity Scholarships applications, a slight decrease from the previous year.

UAC processes Equity Scholarships on behalf of our participating institutions for the following:

- applicants applying via UAC
- applicants applying via QTAC, VTAC and directly to the institution
- currently enrolled students.

## **Schools Recommendation Schemes**

Schools Recommendation Schemes (SRS) allow institutions to make early offers to current Australian Year 12 students who have applied for undergraduate admission through UAC.

Institutions make offers through SRS using criteria other than (or in addition to) the ATAR. These include the applicant's Year 11 studies and the school's ratings of their studies and personal aptitudes.

For 2018–19 admissions, SRS applications opened on Wednesday 1 August 2018 and closed at midnight on Friday 28 September 2018.

A total of 14,254 SRS applications were received during the 2018–19 admissions year, compared with 11,898 for the 2017–18 admissions year. This represents an increase of 2,356, or 19 per cent.

Of all SRS applicants, 13,064 were from NSW, 761 from the ACT, 141 from IB schools, and 288 from all other states.

## **Connect**

During the 2018–19 admissions year (August 2018 to March 2019), the Connect team processed 42,117 applications for CQUniversity, Charles Sturt University, Macquarie University, the University of New England and Western Sydney University. The services provided included assessment of undergraduate and postgraduate courses, as well as early admission schemes. This represents an almost 20 per cent increase on the previous admissions year.

## **Other services**

### **Qualifications Assessment Service**

UAC offers a Qualifications Assessment Service (QAS) for applicants who need to have their qualifications assessed external to UAC's application processes. In 2018–19, UAC provided 1,840 Qualification Assessment Statements to QAS applicants, of which a significant proportion were applying to the University of Sydney's Graduate Medicine and Dentistry courses.

## MARKETING AND ENGAGEMENT



### Kim Paino

General Manager, Marketing and Engagement

Marketing and Engagement develops content to inform and engage with UAC's key stakeholders and audiences. Our multi-channel marketing strategy includes using a mix of print, web, email and social media. Each year we interact face-to-face with thousands of students, parents and careers advisers.

### Customer service

UAC's Customer Service team operates our contact centre. The centre is open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.30pm and handles telephone, counter, email, LiveChat and Facebook enquiries.

In UAC's peak period from August 2018 to February 2019, the centre handled 41,819 calls and 13,378 emails, 585 LiveChat interactions and 591 Facebook direct messages.

The busiest day for UAC is the day ATARs are released. On this day, UAC's customer contact centre received 889 phone enquiries, 116 emails and enquiries from face-to-face visitors. This is in addition to the calls received by the ATAR Enquiry Centre.

Other days on which we answered a high volume of enquiries were: 30 September (early bird closing) – 864 calls and 154 emails; December Round 2 offer day – 757 calls and 136 emails; January Round 1 offer day – 682 calls and 119 emails.

### Community engagement

Over the past year, the Community Engagement team has increased its attendance at school and university events from 215 engagements to 330. Events included 43 Year 10 presentations, 145 Year 11/12 presentations, 25 careers adviser network meetings, 23 school staff development sessions, 40 university engagements, 88 careers expos, 3 UAC days, and 12 video conferences.

The team worked closely with the following universities and attended on-campus information sessions: Australian Catholic University, Charles Sturt University, Macquarie University, Southern Cross University, University of Canberra, University of New England, University of Sydney, UTS Sydney, University of Wollongong, UNSW Sydney and Western Sydney University. Staff presented information about the ATAR, applying through UAC and selecting HSC subjects, and over 200,000 people had the opportunity to ask questions face-to-face.

Community Engagement continued to reach interstate students, parents and teaching staff, attending student information sessions and expos in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania. The Community Engagement team also provides support to schools via phone, email and UAC's social media platforms.

### Marketing and communications

UAC's marketing and communications team produces a variety of content for our website, printed resources and digital marketing assets to support all our audiences, including prospective undergraduate, postgraduate and international applicants.

### Website

UAC's website is the main information source and application facility for undergraduate, postgraduate and international courses at UAC's participating institutions. With over a million unique visitors each year, it provides the organisation with extensive exposure across the country and internationally.

Two new website tools were launched in 2018-19:

- Course Compass: Users select their Year 12 courses and enter their ATAR (or predicted ATAR). Course Compass uses recent applicant data and machine learning to display fields of tertiary study pursued by students with a similar academic background.

- Subject Compass: Year 10 students enter their interests, skills, chosen career path or tertiary study plans to create a profile and view a list of HSC subjects that best matches that profile. They then select their preferred subjects and check whether they will be eligible for an ATAR.

The Marketing team continues to develop and fine-tune content to provide prospective students and their advisers with accurate and accessible information on higher education options.



## Publications

UAC supports equity of access to higher education and produces a range of publications to explain the application and eligibility processes to students, parents and careers advisers.

In 2018–19, UAC's flagship publications included:

- *UAC Guide 2018–19*, a comprehensive resource with application information and lists of courses for domestic undergraduate applicants
- *UAC International 2018–19*, a booklet outlining application information and admission requirements for international students (non-citizens who have an Australian Year 12 qualification) who are eligible to apply through UAC
- *Steps to Uni for Year 10 Students*, designed to help Year 10 students make decisions about which HSC courses to take in Years 11 and 12
- *Steps to Uni for Year 11 and 12 Students*, containing detailed information on the application process.

In order to distribute a copy of *Steps to Uni for Year 10 Students* to every Year 10 student in NSW, the print run for the 2019 edition was significantly increased to 100,000. The higher printing costs were offset by advertising within the publication.

In 2019, changes were made to production and distribution schedules to accommodate an earlier start to the admissions year (April rather than August). For example, the *UAC Guide 2019–20* was distributed to Year 12 students in late March 2019, rather than the usual month of July. In turn, changes were made to content as a result of shorter lead times:

- Course descriptions were removed from the UAC Guide as institutions were unable to provide content for courses starting in semester 1, 2020. To compensate, institution course lists were included in each institution entry.
- Information for international students was integrated into the UAC Guide and the international booklet was discontinued.
- Schools Recommendation Schemes, Educational Access Schemes and Equity Scholarships booklets were discontinued and replaced with an all-in-one brochure.

User feedback on the changes will inform future content.

## Newsletters

UAC publishes two periodical newsletters to advise subscribers of important information about admissions, upcoming events, key dates and scholarship information.

### UAC News

*UAC News* is a quarterly e-newsletter for principals, teachers and careers advisers and includes news from UAC's participating institutions.

In the 2018–19 admissions period the four regular editions were sent, along with a special brand launch edition.

The average number of recipients was more than 2,100, with a strong open rate of 45.4 per cent and a strong click-through rate of 42.5 per cent.

### Directions

*Directions* is a regular e-newsletter for all applicants – undergraduate, domestic international and postgraduate – those looking to study, careers advisers, institution staff and international student agents.

*Directions* was sent to an average of 6,400 recipients six times during the 2018–19 admissions period with an open rate of 33 per cent and a click-through rate of over 11 per cent.



## Media

A media report curating the day's news stories in the higher education and school sector is sent to UAC staff every weekday morning.

UAC sent 47 media releases to a targeted group of media contacts in 2018–19, peaking around the key admissions period of December. These releases had a strong read rate of 67 per cent.

Highlights include a media release announcing the launch of Course Compass on 12 November 2018, which led to media coverage by the *Sydney Morning Herald* and other Fairfax Media mastheads, with a reach of nearly 5.5 million.

Media releases sent on 13 December announcing the release of the 2018 ATAR received coverage in News Ltd's HSC Results Guide, with a reach of nearly 15 million readers.

An opinion piece by Managing Director Dr David Christie on the merits of the ATAR appeared on smh.com.au on 18 December and had a reach of 3.5 million.

UAC's media team also works closely with the Research, Statistics and Development team to publish statistics and commentary at significant points in the application cycle, such as the breakdown of semester 1 applicant and offer numbers.

## Campaigns

In August 2018, UAC launched a campaign to leverage our inclusion in the prestigious AFR Most Innovative Companies list. UAC ranked 41st on the list and was awarded the Best Process Innovation award for releasing Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) documents to NSW HSC students using Ethereum blockchain technology, which allows self-verification of the document and eliminates the potential for fraud. The campaign included targeted emails, advertising and media engagement. We also incorporated a lock-up of the AFR logo with the UAC logo on all staff email signatures and in presentation templates.

In April 2019, we started production on a new campaign video promoting UAC to Year 12 students. Our Access Your Potential video was completed by the end of June 2019, ready for launch ahead of early bird applications closing.

## Social media

Social media continued to enable UAC's Marketing team to engage with and provide advice and support to prospective students throughout their higher education journey.

UAC's social media audience grew steadily throughout the year. Over 11,000 people follow us on Facebook and our posts reached a total of 422,600 people. On Twitter we have a relatively small following of 650; however, we managed over 329,000 impressions. With a renewed focus on posting engaging content, we gained close to 1,000 new followers on Instagram and published a number of stories on Snapchat – both channels are managed by the Community Engagement team.

On 7 December 2018, UAC hosted a Facebook Live event to respond to viewers' questions. Topics included the ATAR, scaling, offers, pathways and equity schemes. The video reached 8,241 people and was viewed over 3,789 times by prospective students, parents and careers advisers. It generated over 2,000 engagements. We ran another Facebook Live event on 29 March to help Year 12 students apply. This video reached over 5,000 students and gained nearly 1,300 engagements.

In 2018–19, video continued to be our most engaging type of content and, with the addition of animation assistance in the team, we were able to increase our output of this type of content.

## Corporate communications

UAC's marketing and communications team works with other departments to produce business development collateral, conference presentations, and submissions to government and industry reviews. We also work with human resources staff to produce in-house training materials.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY



**Dudley Collinson**  
Chief Information Officer

UAC's Information Technology department provides a range of technology-related services to UAC internal departments and the sector, including universities, private institutions, applicants, and state and federal government. These services include systems, applications, tools, core infrastructure, cloud services, project management, systems development, data reporting and analytics.

In 2018-19, IT undertook the following key initiatives:

### Support for new business lines

IT initiated a number of projects in support of the following new business lines:

- UAC Advance (credit management)
- UAC Reach (advertising campaigns)
- UAC Insights (business intelligence).

### New business for UAC Connect

A number of projects were completed for the UAC Connect business line. These included:

- enablement of continuous ('rolling') admissions
- enablement of flexible double degree applications
- development of a web service API to directly transfer data from UAC to student administration systems
- development of a comprehensive admissions, scholarship and accommodation application integrated with university systems
- development of an agent portal for lodgement of international applications to be assessed by UAC.

### Changes to centralised admissions

The following projects were completed during the year:

- development of an Educational Access Schemes online application, which has reduced the number of paper-based applications received by UAC, saving processing time and handling charges and significantly reducing business risk
- conversion of UAC's system-generated correspondence artefacts into an interactive web format with document management, workflow tracking and user-friendly editing tools.

### Student assistance

A number of projects were undertaken to provide improved information for students in the selection of courses:

- Course Seeker Phase 1 saw the development of a portal for the Commonwealth Department of Education to display all undergraduate courses available in Australia. This was delivered in partnership with the other tertiary admission centres. UAC led this work and is hosting the solution.
- Course Compass was developed to help Year 12 students choose a university course based on their school subjects and expected ATAR. This UAC website tool uses machine learning and draws on UAC's extensive data on Year 12 students, course selection, and grade point averages for students who have progressed to university.
- Subject Compass was developed to help Year 10 students choose their HSC subjects based on their interests and possible tertiary course choices. It is also available on the UAC website.

### Support for ongoing operations

IT continued to provide support for the business, including:

- changing the ATAR program to accommodate changes made to the NSW curriculum, and developing additional reports requested by the Technical Committee on Scaling
- maintaining IT systems and infrastructure
- facilitating opening and closing of applications, offer rounds, ATAR calculation and ATAR release.

## IT infrastructure

The following enhancements were made:

- The email system was converted from Lotus Notes to Microsoft Outlook.
- The firewall at the UAC Sydney Olympic Park office was upgraded.
- The resilience of UAC telephone lines was improved by converting half of the ISDN lines at Olympic Park to SIP lines at the disaster recovery data centre.

## Business continuity and disaster recovery

Ongoing improvements were made to UAC's ability to cope with a disruption to business activities:

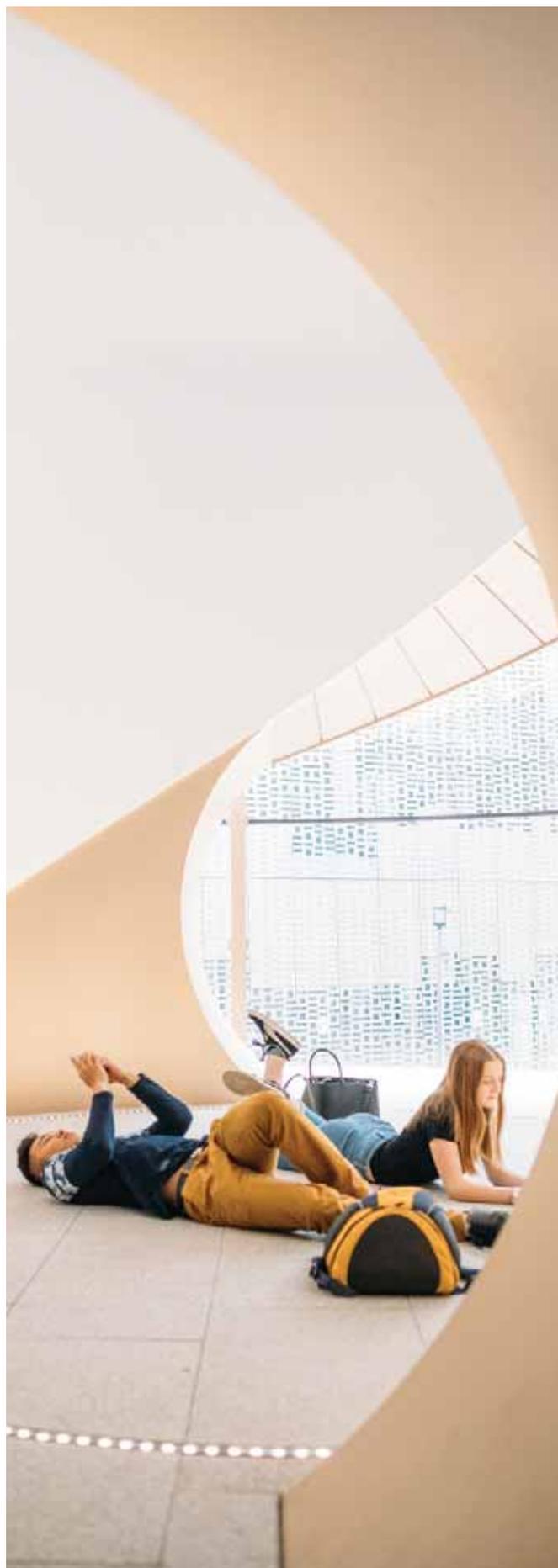
- External consultants were engaged to review UAC's Business Continuity Plan and assist in a redevelopment of this and associated documents. A successful test of the plan was completed.
- An extended IT disaster recovery failover test was successfully completed, with the business running from the disaster recovery site for three weeks without impact to services.

## Main admissions period

The months of December and January are the busiest times of the year for core IT systems. Several systems reach peak load in accommodating large volumes of public access.

Key dates and volumes included:

- ATARs released on 14 December 2018 – between 8.30am and 12.00pm 50,600 students retrieved their ATAR and there were 8,952 subsequent changes to course preferences
- December Round 2 offers released on 20 December 2018 – 40,621 applicants logged on to retrieve their offers and full offer details were emailed to each applicant
- January Round 1 offers released on 11 January 2019 – 17,352 applicants logged on to retrieve their offers and full offer details were emailed to each applicant.



## BUSINESS ANALYTICS



**Anthony Manny**

General Manager, Business Analytics

The Business Analytics unit made further advancements during its second full year of operation with positive contributions to many facets of UAC's mission. The Data Analytics program of work commenced and includes four projects:

- Data Governance
- Metrics
- Analytics – Dashboard
- Bespoke Integrations.

The Data Governance project is scheduled to commence during the next financial year. While UAC's current data governance is adequate for existing operations, this project will include a governance upgrade to support UAC's evolution and the services it will provide in the foreseeable future.

The Metrics project involves reviewing current data and capturing new data sources. To date, this project has delivered a geocoding project enabling UAC to validate applicants' addresses with the GNAF database. This gives UAC more precise socio-economic applicant data and daily UAC website data, which we can now provide to institutions as part of the Analytics – Dashboard project.

The Analytics – Dashboard project has commenced with the development of proof of concept dashboards. The full release of production dashboards is scheduled for the next financial year. They will give internal and external customers greater access to more data in a clean, intuitive and easy-to-navigate dashboard, allowing for easier decision-making. Institutions will be able to analyse their applicant data and, as a result, determine who to target through UAC Reach.

The Bespoke Integrations project will develop dashboards and reports, integrating UAC data with data from institutions and other agencies, and will be rolled out subject to demand.



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## **ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19**

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### **About this publication**

The *UAC Annual Report 2018-19* gives an overview of the operations of the Universities Admissions Centre (UAC) during 2018-19 and includes department highlights.

# ACCESS YOUR POTENTIAL.

## UAC

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