

# On the Defence of ATAR

Phillip Anthony  
Brisbane, Australia

Unpublished Paper  
V1.0 of 25 August 2020

The views expressed in this Paper are entirely the author's own and are not meant to represent the views of any other person or organisation.

# On the Defence of ATAR

## Background

Over quite a few years now, there have been an array of calls for the end of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (Rank)<sup>1</sup>. The most recent is an online *#NoATAR2020* petition which has collected over 24,000 signatures<sup>2</sup>. Many of these calls have originated in the secondary system from well-meaning educators who are somewhat removed from the actual activity and responsibility of selecting applicants for tertiary courses.

While these calls typically identify flaws of the ATAR, particularly its impacts on secondary students, they also typically focus on proposing alternatives to the ATAR for a single homogeneous group of students (eg current VCE students applying for tertiary places in Victoria), or a specific cohort of applicants (eg students undertaking regular Australian Year 12 programs of study), and largely ignore the other important factors relevant to FAIR, OPEN and ACCOUNTABLE tertiary admissions, particularly consideration of the other cohorts of tertiary applicants seeking admission to higher education courses.

The purpose of this Paper is to provide the reader with a more thorough understanding of ATARs and why these (or other fine-grained measures of overall student achievement) are likely to remain a defining feature of undergraduate tertiary admissions in Australia. While other criteria and methods of selecting applicants to tertiary courses might have some utility, at the end of the day, ATARs provide for a more FAIR, OPEN and ACCOUNTABLE solution for the diverse cohorts of applicants seeking tertiary admission.<sup>3</sup>

## What is the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)?

*In a nutshell:*

- ATAR is a numerical measure of a student's overall academic achievement in their senior years of schooling.
- It is a rank, not a score.
- It is expressed on a 2000-point scale which extends from 99.95 (highest) down to 0 in steps of 0.05.
- The highest ATAR is 99.95, then 99.90, then 99.85 and so on down to 0.
- ATARs below 30 are reported as '30.00 or less'.
- ATARs are used to rank order in-state and out-of-state students for selection to tertiary courses in-state and out-of-state.
- ATARs are comparable and interchangeable across jurisdictions. This means that an ATAR of 99.95 from WA has the same value as an ATAR of 99.95 from NSW, ACT or any other jurisdiction.

*Other important points:*

- ATARs are calculated in most jurisdictions by the local Tertiary Admissions Centre (TAC)<sup>4</sup>. TACs are typically owned by the public universities in their jurisdiction.
- Each jurisdiction has its own rules about eligibility requirements for their students to qualify for the local ATAR, including any mandated subjects for inclusion in the local ATAR.
- The inputs into the ATAR are predominantly the subject results from the regular Year 12 system (eg NSW HSC, QLD QCE, etc).
- Boards of Study (NESA in NSW, SACE Board in South Australia, etc) have responsibility for certifying students with the subject results from which ATARs are calculated by the TACs.
- To ensure fairness, subject results are scaled in all jurisdictions as part of the ATAR calculation process.
- There is no secret about how ATARs are calculated.<sup>5</sup>

## What the ATAR is not

Like any fine-grained tertiary ranking measure, the ATAR is not:

- A measure of a student's social worth.
- A mechanism to compare, measure and rank schools via leagues tables or similar<sup>6</sup>.
- A tool to measure the performance of teachers.
- A device to screen candidates for jobs, or to determine salary scales or rates of pay.

At its core, the ATAR is a fair, open and accountable mechanism to ration a scarce resource; that scarce resource typically being a Commonwealth-supported place in an undergraduate tertiary course where the number of eligible applicants applying exceeds the number of places available (the 'quota'). The purpose of ATAR is probably best understood in the following simplistic introduction to tertiary admission where ATAR is not available to be used.

## A simplistic introduction to tertiary admissions

Imagine there are no ATARs and you are the course administrator for a Bachelor of Business course offered at University X. There is only one place available in your Bachelor of Business course, and you receive applications from the following 3 applicants:

Applicant 1: High student graduate, 18 years old, average of 90% in 6 high school subjects.

Applicant 2: TAFE student, 20 years old, average performance in previous Year 12, recently completed a Diploma of Business at their local TAFE Institute.

Applicant 3: Mature age student, 55 years old. No year 12 or other prior academic achievement. Has worked for 40 years in retail and management, including the last 10 years as the State Manager for Myer department stores.

Each of these applicants can make a different, but very valid claim to be selected to your Bachelor of Business course:

Applicant 1: *"I worked very hard over 2 years of senior schooling in 6 subjects. While I was not the dux of my school, I still achieved in the top 10% of all Year 12s."*

Applicant 2: *"While I was only an average student in high school, I worked very hard over the last 2 years to complete a Diploma of Business at my local TAFE Institute, while also working full-time. My Diploma is directly related to the Bachelor of Business degree I am now seeking entry to."*

Applicant 3: *"When I was younger I had to leave school at the end of Year 10 and enter the workforce to support my family. After 40 years of work (and paying taxes!), I want to achieve recognition of the skills and capabilities I have achieved via a Bachelor of Business degree. In fact, I will be a great asset to the course, as I will be able to share my first-hand experience as a Senior Company Executive."*

As the course administrator responsible for selecting one of these three applicants, who do you choose for your course? Indeed, are you able to make a selection decision?

Here are some relevant but rather awkward questions to accompany your decision making:

- Are you able to make this selection without making an irregular, arbitrary or unfair decision?
- Can you justify your selection decision to the other 2 applicants who were not successful, and to your University Registrar to whom you are ultimately responsible for selection decisions?
- Can you articulate your decision making to the University's lawyer who is dealing with discrimination claims being brought against the University by the 2 unsuccessful applicants?
- If you are sick and away from work, would your replacement make the same selection decision?

Quite a few awkward questions and we only have to deal with 3 applicants for 1 course! As you will be aware, the above scenario does not exist in reality: there are no tertiary courses that have just one place available. But the awkward questions are the same for courses which have many more places available. Let's have a look at a course which has 100 places available.

## **1000 applicants for 100 places**

For many courses in the health sciences that lead to professional outcomes – Medicine, Dental Science, Optometry, Physiotherapy, Nursing, Midwifery, and so on - the number of applicants seeking entry typically far outnumber the available places. For courses in Dental Science, leading to registration to practice as a Dentist, it would not be unusual for there to be 10 or more applicants applying for each available place. In other words: 1000 applicants for 100 available places. For the next part of this Paper, let us look at what currently occurs with selecting 100 students from these 1000 applicants at University X.

## **Information about the undergraduate Bachelor of Dental Science course at University X**

The fictitious University X has 100 dental chairs and is funded to run the Bachelor of Dental Science course as an undergraduate program for 100 new students each year. As the funding is for undergraduate delivery of the course, it is not possible to convert the course from undergraduate to graduate-entry, nor to allocate a portion of the undergraduate places to graduate-entry.

Each year the number of applications received for the Bachelor of Dental Science course is typically in the range 1000 to 1200 applicants.

To be considered for the course, applicants must successfully complete an English and Mathematics subject studied to Year 12 level (there are acceptable alternatives, but the alternatives to Mathematics must be Algebra and Calculus rich).

## **How University X currently select students to its undergraduate Bachelor of Dental Science course**

Application is made via the local Tertiary Admissions Centre, which undertakes assessment (determining eligibility and ranking) of all applicants on behalf of University X according to the rules of University X.

This year there are 1050 applicants for the University's Bachelor of Dental Science course. 50 of these applicants do not satisfy the English and/or Mathematics subject prerequisites specified as minimum entry requirements, and are removed from the pool of applicants to be considered for an offer.

The remaining 1000 applicants are placed in a descending order of merit based on their actual ATARs or on ATAR equivalent ranking derived from tables of conversion called schedules<sup>7</sup>.

In mid-January, when full assessment has been finalised for all 1050 applicants by the TAC, offers are made in a descending order of merit for the 1000 eligible applicants satisfying the subject prerequisites, starting with those having an ATAR or ATAR-equivalent ranking of 99.95, then those on 99.90, and so on down to 99.65. At ATAR 99.65, the 100 places have been fully allocated and this becomes the published admission threshold. Those 900 applicants ranked 99.60 and lower are unsuccessful, and are considered for their other tertiary course preferences listed in their TAC applications.

When you simply view the above summary of how ATARs were used in selecting 100 applicants from amongst 1000, it is easy to believe that other methods can replicate the same result. But there are some important aspects of this process that are not apparent until you start to consider facets which make Australian undergraduate admissions ATAR-based selection by far, more FAIR, OPEN and ACCOUNTABLE than any other methods. In a moment we will lift the hood and show you what's going on that you may not be aware of that demonstrate this.

## ***But first, let's look at the realities that were at play – some should be apparent:***

### **Reality 1: 900 applicants are going to miss out on an offer**

In this Dental Science scenario, it does not matter how you slice or dice it, there are only 100 places in the Bachelor of Dental Science course, but there are 1000 eligible applicants. 900 applicants are going to miss out on an offer. No alternative solution is going to overcome this reality. The factors determining ATAR admission thresholds are: the number of places available in the course (the quota), and the number and quality of applicants who apply. And as noted in the points below, there is no way to either substantially increase the number of places available in the course to match demand, or decrease the number or quality of applicants applying.

### **Reality 2: It is not possible to increase the number of available places to match the demand**

There is typically one or more constraints on how many places are available in an individual tertiary course. This includes funding, teaching staff, clinical placements, and so on. In the case of Dental Science courses, it also includes the number of dental chairs available for the training of students. It is not financially possible for a university to increase the number of places available to match anywhere near the number of eligible applicants applying.

### **Reality 3: Applicant interest in high demand courses**

Dental Science along with a range of other courses (particularly in the Health Sciences), have traditionally been in very high demand. There is nothing to suggest that interest in these types of courses is going to wane any time soon. People want to be dentists, doctors, veterinarians, physiotherapists, midwives, etc, because of a range of factors that have stood the test of time.

### **Reality 4: Quality of applicants**

With an admission threshold for an offer of 99.65, it is clear that the majority of the 1000 eligible applicants are very high academic achievers, whether it is in the NSW HSC, the Victorian VCE, the International Baccalaureate, in their prior tertiary study, and so on. An ATAR of 99.65 would suggest academically achieving students in the top 0.35% (in lay terms perhaps: the cream of the cream). Applicants at this end of the admissions spectrum are very similar and are difficult to differentiate on non-academic criteria like personal motivation, maturity, and so on.

## ***Lifting the hood on what you probably missed...***

### ***Point 1: ATAR takes account of the diversity of the Applicant Pool***

Of the 1000 applicants who have satisfied minimum requirements:

- Many will be students who have completed Year 12 in-state (mostly in the current year and some in previous years).
- Some will be students who have completed Year 12 out-of-state (mostly in the current year and some in previous years).
- Some will be students from New Zealand (who compete for domestic places with Australian citizens and Australian permanent residents).
- Some will be Australian citizens or Australian permanent residents who have completed or are completing overseas Year 12 programs of study (eg the US High School Diploma at an international school in Indonesia, the *Abitur* in Germany, etc), and these persons will be physically located overseas until the commencement of the course.
- Some will be students who completed Year 12 last year, were unsuccessful in gaining entry to the Bachelor of Dental Science, and have spent the last year upgrading in a Bachelor of Science or other less preferred tertiary course in the expectation that they can use their results in this less preferred tertiary study to gain entry to their preferred course of tertiary study.
- Some will be graduates of other tertiary courses who are now looking for a career change.
- Some will have undertaken one of the many other bridging, preparatory or Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs which have been promoted as pathways to tertiary study.
- Some will even seek entry from their status as mature-age, basing their application on prior work experience and life achievements.

## **Point 2: ATAR takes account of the diverse range of Year 12 programs operating across Australia.**

It should also be remembered that there is a diversity of Year 12 programs operating in-state and across jurisdictions. While we can talk about National Curriculum in Australia, there is no single overarching Australian Higher School Certificate, Australian Baccalaureate or similar. Each of the 8 jurisdictions in Australia (6 states and 2 territories) administers its own regular Year 12 system currently leading to ATAR (eg NSW HSC, TAS TCE, etc), and many other secondary programs operating alongside these regular Year 12 systems, including:

- International Baccalaureate Diploma (all jurisdictions)
- International Baccalaureate Career-related Program (QLD)
- Accelerated Christian Education (all jurisdictions)
- Rudolf Steiner Schools (all jurisdictions)
- Home Schooling (all jurisdictions)
- French Baccalaureate (delivered in French) (ACT)
- A Levels (administered by Cambridge International Examinations) (ACT)
- Individual school programs (eg Toowoomba Christian Academy, QLD)

ATAR takes account of the diverse range of Year 12 programs operating across Australia by allowing relativities to be established among these through a common scale of tertiary entry rankings.

## **Point 3: ATAR takes account of the relativities between these diverse qualifications**

ATARs, and the deriving of ATAR-equivalent values, allows relativities of this diverse array of qualifications presented by applicants in support of their tertiary study application to be expressed on a common scale. Over many years, it is possible to calibrate<sup>8</sup> the schedules which derive the ATAR-equivalent values to ensure these are fair across in-state, out-of-state and international qualifications, and across the variety of qualification types (secondary, tertiary, bridging, and so on). This ensures one cohort of students (eg in-state Year 12s) are not advantaged or disadvantaged relative to cohorts of other qualified applicants (eg IB, applicants with prior tertiary study, VET qualifications, etc).

Calibration, and a willingness to publish or make schedules available for review by prospective applicants ensures that the process is not only FAIR, but SEEN to be FAIR to this diverse pool of applicants, particularly the Year 12s. *Why?* To ensure that University X does not end up in court defending claims of making irregularly, arbitrary, and unfair decisions, particularly against unsuccessful interstate Year 12 students.

## **Point 4: ATARs overcome student challenges to decisions about admission**

- **Selection based on Academic Merit defended by the Courts**
- ***Sweeney vs The University of Sydney (and the University of NSW)***

Because of the competition for places, courses like Dental Science attract significant numbers of out-of-state applications from persons (particularly Year 12s) who apply for such programs in their home state, but who also seek to maximise their opportunity to gain entry (eg have back-ups out-of-state) if they are unsuccessful in their home state. Perceptions by students of being disadvantaged in the admissions process relative to local students have ended up in court.

*“The courts are well aware that students may need to compete for a place in their desired course and that some students will fall short of the rank required for admission. In *Harding v University of New South Wales* judicial notice has been taken, for example, of the fact that:*

*...competition for enrolment in the Faculty of Medicine is intense...[as] reflected in the high admission standards...[and the fact] that the study of medicine requires considerable dedication and academic ability [and]...[f]or these reasons the competition for places is based on academic merit.’<sup>9</sup>*



While The University of NSW successfully defended its admission decisions in the Supreme Court of NSW against both Harding (cited above) and subsequently with The University of Sydney against Sweeney (details included in the endnote), it is the latter that was one of the origins for national measures of overall academic achievement<sup>10</sup> which now culminate in the ATAR. Sweeney was a Victorian student who (in the days before ATAR), argued unsuccessfully, that he should be given the same tertiary ranking in New South Wales as he had been given in Victoria.

#### **Point 5: ATARs facilitate cross-border tertiary admissions**

As ATAR is a common measure across Australia, it is able to facilitate cross-border tertiary admissions from diversely qualified Year 12s, ensuring a fair and consistent consideration of all Year 12s in a common currency that everyone can understand.

#### **Point 6: ATARs allows for an explanation as to why an applicant was unsuccessful**

With ATARs, it is possible to explain to every single unsuccessful applicant why they did not receive an offer. For example:

*"The admission threshold for the Bachelor of Dental Science this year was 99.65. Your ATAR of 98.50 was below this admission threshold. There were 1050 applications for this course, and only 100 places available."*

Further (if further is required):

*"There were 343 other applicants on ATARs of 98.50 up to and including 99.60 who also did not receive an offer. The reason you and these other 343 applicants did not receive an offer is not because you are not good enough to succeed in the course. The reason is that there were not enough places available. If you wish to apply next year, suitable pathways include..."*

#### **Point 7: ATARs provide visibility to viable pathways for admission**

By expressing the admission threshold in a numerical format (ie ATAR) it is possible for unsuccessful and prospective applicants to receive advice about viable pathways for future admission. It is also possible to identify those pathways which will not be viable.

For viable pathways, the level of achievement required (like GPA in a less preferred Bachelors degree course) can be made explicit. For example, achieving grades of 'PASS' will not be sufficient to transfer; to be competitive for the Bachelor of Dental Science course a student must achieve mostly grades of High Distinction.

#### **Point 8: ATARs facilitate transparency in admissions**

ATARs facilitate transparency in admissions because admission thresholds can be expressed in a numerical format (eg ATAR 99.65), and as there is no secret about these thresholds, these can be published and made publicly available.

#### **Point 9: ATARs accommodate late change of mind on tertiary choices**

As ATARs are created for students in mid to late December each year, it is possible for students to view their actual Year 12 results including ATAR, and to make changes of preferences to their list of tertiary courses for equal consideration in the major round of offers to high demand courses which takes place each mid-January. For a student who has blossomed academically in Year 12, this can be a game changer as it ensures the student is not locked in to choices that might have been made 6 months or even a year earlier.

#### **Point 10: ATARs allow students to concentrate on their Year 12 studies**

Unless other criteria is specified for admission, students are not distracted or required to divert their attention away from their secondary studies if ATAR is the sole or primary admission consideration.

### **Point 11: Special consideration and other factors accommodated by ATAR via bonuses (adjustment factors)**

To compensate individuals whose tertiary preparation has been impacted by factors outside their control, a system of bonuses (called adjustment factors) can be applied to an individual student's ATAR to compensate for those impacts. While the student's actual ATAR does not change, for admission to a particular course or institution, it can be increased by an amount of bonus commensurate with the impact of the disadvantage according to the specific rules of an institution.

In most Australian jurisdictions, the process of special consideration is undertaken through a centralised *Educational Access Scheme* (EAS), *Special Entry Access Scheme* (SEAS) or similar process. These special consideration cases are assessed impartially by specialist assessors who are able to rate the level of impact on an individual's tertiary preparation regardless of what factor or factors contributed to that impact. The categories of disadvantage vary slightly between jurisdictions, but typically include financial hardship, English language difficulties, personal illness or disability, personal circumstances, and educational disruption.

Other factors might also be relevant for consideration in the admission process for a particular institution include disadvantaged schools, Year 12 subject bonus, new to higher education, and rurality. These are typically operationalised through an automated bonus system that takes account of an institution's rules for the capping of a maximum amount of bonus.

### **Point 12: ATAR negates the need to resort to lotteries**

Because of the very fine grained reporting of ATARs, it is possible to avoid clumping of what appear to be equally qualified applicants, even where there might be 1000 eligible applicants applying for a very much smaller number of available places, like 100, or even 50.

In the absence of this ability to discriminate at a very fine level between otherwise eligible applicants, there might be a perception that a lottery is a great equaliser, and in the context of a course like the Bachelor of Dental Science would give everyone an equal chance of gaining 1 of those coveted 100 available places. Lotteries in tertiary admission are not new and have been used to select otherwise eligible applicants for tertiary places<sup>11</sup>.

As one course administrator justified, in the face of having to use a lottery to select a small number of students from a much larger pool of otherwise equally eligible applicants for her course:

*"It a lottery was good enough to select young Australian men to fight and die in Vietnam, then a lottery is good enough for me to select students for my course."*

However, what a lottery says to prospective applicants is that you can be average, or even mediocre and still jump the best and most deserving students. I would personally contend that the use of a lottery is an admission of failure in the admissions process.

### **Point 13: ATARs ensure money and wealth plays no part in the admissions process**

ATAR ensures money and wealth plays no part in the Australian admissions process like it appears to play in the US admissions process.

*"If you are a child in the top 1% economically: you have a 77 times greater chance of being in the Ivy League than if your parents are in the bottom 20%."*<sup>12</sup>.

*"We'll always help students if family had a lot of financial resources. You were really looking at seven figure donations, eight figure donations. But sometimes six figures plus a connection with someone on the Board was even more powerful."*<sup>13</sup>



There will be some who may argue that money and wealth already plays a part in educationally advantaging one child over another in Australia, whether this is through access to a better resourced school, tutors, computer equipment, and so on.

However, with admission based on ATARs, it is not possible for wealth to play a part in the admissions process beyond the school. In more specific terms: for selection to a tertiary place in Australia, it is not possible for the child of average academic ability (say ATAR 75.00) but with wealthy parents, to jump the child of superior academic ability (say ATAR 99.75) from a lower socio-economic background.

#### **Point 14: ATARs ensure personal bias and similar factors play no part in the Admissions process**

The mechanical nature of ATAR to rank order applicants for selection to Australian tertiary courses ensures that personal bias is removed from the selection decision. It would be fair to say the personal bias of admission officers and institutional priorities of US universities and colleges would be unacceptable in an Australian context.

- *“All admission officers - we all have personal biases based on how we grew up...”*
- *“... so all you have to do is talk about women’s’ rights or student diversity, leadership conference, I was all over you...”*
- *“I had a soft spot for children who were from poverty. We’re people and we all kind of gravitate towards our own personal experience.”*
- *“And of course young women... and young women of colour I’m just gonna keep it real, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, in there, I was all over you. So yes I have a lot of biases!”*
- *“It was very sobering to learn that there are so many spots reserved for certain students, whether it is legacy students, whether it is development cases - either their parents have already given significant money to the institution or plan to. Once you fill up your class with those institutional priorities there isn’t a whole lot of room left for regular kids who are absolutely extraordinary but no one is fighting for them.”<sup>14</sup>*

#### **Point 15: ATARs limit the opportunity for corruption and an admissions scandal**

The reader may have a passing knowledge of the 2019 College Admission Scandal<sup>15</sup> which was a criminal conspiracy to influence undergraduate admissions decisions at several top American universities. The scale was unprecedented: 33 parents of college applicants accused of paying between \$200,000 and \$6.5 million for guaranteed admission for their children to 11 universities including Yale, Georgetown, University of Southern California and Stanford.

The range of fraudulent activities was also unprecedented:

- Bribing exam administrators to facilitate cheating on college and university entrance exams (SAT and ACT).
- Bribing coaches and administrators of elite universities to nominate unqualified applicants as elite recruited athletes, thus facilitating the applicants' admission.
- Using a charitable organization to conceal the source and nature of laundered bribery payments.

The inputs into a student’s ATAR and the subsequent admissions process based on ATAR do not include criteria like money/personal wealth, donations, fame or celebrity status, family connections or university contacts, race, ethnicity, class or similar. ATAR makes it explicitly possible to both identify minimum entry thresholds for tertiary courses and to report those minimum entry thresholds. ATARs ensure that admissions officers do not hand pick students based on particular interests or biases. And importantly, there are plenty of “eyes on offers” in the Australian tertiary admissions process which makes it very difficult/impossible to hide admission “irregularities”<sup>16</sup>.

**So, for those folks out there advocating for an end to the ATAR, will your alternative:**

- 1) Take account of the diversity of the applicant pool (in-state, out-of-state, and overseas)?
- 2) Take account of the diversity of the current Year 12 applicant pool?
- 3) Take account of the relativities between the diverse array of qualifications presented for tertiary admission?
- 4) Not lead to student challenges to decisions about admission?
- 5) Facilitate cross-border tertiary admissions?
- 6) Allow for an explanation as to why an applicant was unsuccessful?
- 7) Provide visibility to viable pathways for admission, particularly future admission for unsuccessful applicants?
- 8) Facilitate transparency in admissions?
- 9) Accommodate late changes of mind on tertiary choices by students?
- 10) Allow students to concentrate on their Year 12 studies?
- 11) Accommodate a student's special consideration and other factors of interest to a tertiary institution?
- 12) Negate the need to resort to lotteries?
- 13) Ensure money and wealth play no part in the admissions process?
- 14) Ensure personal bias and similar factors plays no part in the admissions process?
- 15) Limit the opportunity for corruption and an admissions scandal?

***In summary: will your alternative to the ATAR be FAIR (and OPEN and ACCOUNTABLE) in selecting applicants to tertiary courses?***

---

## REFERENCES AND END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See in particular:

Watson, P, "We need to kill the ATAR now, deputy principal says" (11 June 2019), accessible at: <https://educationhq.com/news/we-need-to-kill-the-atar-now-deputy-principal-says-60286/>

Williams, T, "SA Education chief executive Rick Persse says ATAR system won't last much longer" in *The Advertiser* (24 September 2019) accessible at: [www.adelaidenow.com.au/education/sa-education-department-chief-executive-rick-persse-says-atar-system-wont-last-much-longer/news-story/bc866c27d944119e8567dc5b30e33461](http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/education/sa-education-department-chief-executive-rick-persse-says-atar-system-wont-last-much-longer/news-story/bc866c27d944119e8567dc5b30e33461)

Winkler, T, "ATAR admissions: unjust and obsolete" (17 June 2020), accessible at: <https://campusmorningmail.com.au/news/atar-admissions-unjust-and-obsolete>

Zaglas, W, "Relying solely on ATAR 'profoundly distorts' educational experience: Peter Shergold" (11 June 2020) in *Campus Review* online.

<sup>2</sup> Accessible at: [www.change.org/p/take-the-pressure-off-year-12-students-noatar2020-during-covid-19](http://www.change.org/p/take-the-pressure-off-year-12-students-noatar2020-during-covid-19).

<sup>3</sup> Two positive aspects of ATAR are not covered in this Paper: cost and operational efficiency and utility as a predictor of student success at university (and therefore as a selection device). The former is worthy of a separate paper; the latter is adequately covered by the UAC Papers, "The Usefulness of the ATAR as a Measure of Academic Achievement and Potential" (October 2019) and "The Effectiveness and Limitations of the ATAR" (December 2019), which can be accessed from: [www.uac.edu.au/submissions-and-reports/the-usefulness-of-the-atar-as-a-measure-of-academic-achievement-and-potential](http://www.uac.edu.au/submissions-and-reports/the-usefulness-of-the-atar-as-a-measure-of-academic-achievement-and-potential) and [www.uac.edu.au/submissions-and-reports/effectiveness-and-limitations-of-the-atar](http://www.uac.edu.au/submissions-and-reports/effectiveness-and-limitations-of-the-atar)

<sup>4</sup> In Tasmania by TASC on behalf of The University of Tasmania. In New Zealand for NCEA students by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).

<sup>5</sup> See for example: "Calculating the ATAR in Queensland – Technical Document – Version 1.0" (August 2019) accessible at: [www.qtac.edu.au/ArticleDocuments/379/Calculating\\_ATAR\\_in\\_QLD.v1.0%202019.pdf.aspx](http://www.qtac.edu.au/ArticleDocuments/379/Calculating_ATAR_in_QLD.v1.0%202019.pdf.aspx)

---

<sup>6</sup> Although this has not stopped anyone from doing so, particularly media. Like the public reporting of NAPLAN, part of the image problem for ATAR and its predecessors is that these have been used as *de facto* measures of the quality of schools and their students. See in particular:

Beikoff, K. and Power, L., "Class We Failed" in *The Daily Telegraph* (8 January 1997 – Morning edition), pages 1, 8-10.

Sheehan, P., "Parents the X-factor in education rankings" in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (online) (9 April 2012), accessible at: [www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/parents-the-x-factor-in-education-rankings-20120408-1wj7d.html](http://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/parents-the-x-factor-in-education-rankings-20120408-1wj7d.html)

Boulter, H., "Parents Condemn Canberra Times' School League Tables" (6 March 2015), accessible at: [saveourschools.com.au/league-tables/parents-condemn-canberra-times-school-league-tables](http://saveourschools.com.au/league-tables/parents-condemn-canberra-times-school-league-tables).

<sup>7</sup> Schedules are tables or lists of conversion which allow for tertiary entrance rankings to be derived from a particular qualification. For example, many TACs would have a suite of 500 or more schedules to derive ATAR-equivalent rankings from A Levels from the UK, the US High School Diploma, the *Bachillerato* from El Salvador, a year of tertiary study at Bachelors level, a completed AQF Diploma, and even work experience (eg 5 years as an Accounts Clerk).

<sup>8</sup> Calibration is typically performed via research, such as through a cohort study which measures the first year performance of students admitted to tertiary study with a particular qualification (eg the IB Diploma, a VET Diploma, etc). A control group – typically in-state Year 12s admitted to tertiary study on ATAR – would also be established to provide for comparisons to be undertaken as part of the cohort study.

<sup>9</sup> The reference for this can be found at: <http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/MelbULawRw/2010/5.html#fn115>

<sup>10</sup> These previous measures have been called the Interstate Transfer Index (ITI), Universities Admission Index (UAI), Equivalent Notional Tertiary Entry Rank (ENTER), and Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER), but regardless of their nomenclature, these were equally comparable measures of overall student achievement. For example, a UAI of 89.65 = ENTER of 89.65 = TER of 89.65 for both in-state students and out-of-state students.

<sup>11</sup> See in particular:

Stone, P., "Access to Higher Education by the Luck of the Draw" in *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 57, No. 3, *Special Issue on Fair Access to Higher Education* (August 2013), pp. 577-599; accessible from: [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/670663?seq=1](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/670663?seq=1)

and the use of lotteries to select students to Physiotherapy programs at two British universities: Curtis, P., "Universities use 'lottery system' to select candidates" in *The Guardian* (online) 28 April 2004, accessible at: [www.theguardian.com/education/2004/apr/27/highereducation.accesstouniversity](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2004/apr/27/highereducation.accesstouniversity)

<sup>12</sup> 'The Tale Of 3 Classes' at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=eapokXbeCGM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eapokXbeCGM). See also "College Admissions and the Growing Wealth Gap" by Daniel Golden at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEpgSLEA994](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEpgSLEA994).

<sup>13</sup> "How Broken The College Admissions Process Is (HBO)" at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0v5yHnWCiLE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0v5yHnWCiLE).

<sup>14</sup> See in particular: "How Broken The College Admissions Process Is (HBO)" at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0v5yHnWCiLE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0v5yHnWCiLE).

<sup>15</sup> An 80-minuted dramatized recreation of the scandal was produced by the American cable company Lifetime – "The College Admissions Scandal 2019" – which can be viewed at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfCykVyy-ZY&t=80s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfCykVyy-ZY&t=80s).

<sup>16</sup> In Queensland for example, schools have access to their students' subject results, tertiary rankings and offers. Offers to undergraduate courses are made through the local TAC which, along with the offering university, is reporting offers as part of the transparency data to *Course Seeker* and to the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS).