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SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO ATEC DISCUSSION PAPER ON A MORE JOINED-UP TERTIARY ADMISSION SYSTEM

AUSTRALASIAN CONFERENCE OF TERTIARY ADMISSIONS CENTRES (ACTAC)

ACTAC: Coordinating consistent admissions nationwide

The Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admissions Centres (ACTAC) comprises the five state and territory admissions centres in Australia, as well as the University of Tasmania. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority is also a participant in ACTAC processes.

ACTAC facilitates coordination and sharing of practice between tertiary admissions centres to benefit learners and providers and assist interstate student mobility. ACTAC welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback in response to the ATEC Discussion Paper on A More Joined-Up Tertiary Admission System.

ACTAC responses to Discussion Paper questions

Q1. What actions will be most effective for ensuring that learners are better informed of the depth and range of course offerings and occupations when deciding on career options and tertiary education pathways?

- Tertiary admissions centres play a key role in facilitating course exploration and comparison through our online search tools and strong engagement with the school sector. This includes supporting students with information about VET and higher education studies. TACs ensure that students have access to reliable, unbiased, and comprehensive information about tertiary admissions, including course selection, entry requirements, pathways and employment opportunities. TACs are well-positioned to support government in promoting and implementing a more joined-up tertiary system.
- This information is an important part of the existing ecosystem of tertiary course information, including government and education provider websites, tertiary admissions centres, and other general sources of information on tertiary study such as open days, expos, school careers advisers, and social media. Supporting tertiary admissions centres to act as a central point of information and application for a broader range of courses will benefit learners and support parity of esteem between VET and higher education courses. Currently, some VET courses are available through tertiary admissions centres, however this varies by jurisdiction. For example, TAFE SA course applications can be submitted through SATAC and some, but not all, VET courses offered by Victorian TAFE institutes can be listed as VTAC preferences. Internationally, UCAS in the

United Kingdom accepts applications across all sectors, recently adding apprenticeships to its offerings.

- TAC websites also include information outlining various ATAR and non-ATAR entry options, such as enabling programs, VET programs and pathways, foundation studies, university preparation programs, and the Skills for Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT).
- Tertiary admissions centres provide consistent information that makes the process easier to navigate for students, especially those with less access to support, including students from low SES backgrounds and rural and regional areas. The centralised TAC application system increases student options and mobility by removing barriers to applying for multiple courses at different institutions and potentially in different sectors.
- There is an opportunity to provide a greater focus on the links between tertiary courses and future employment and careers (including market demand), including areas of skill shortage through TAC websites.
- TACs and careers adviser networks could be leveraged to promote awareness of national skills shortages and areas where future demand for workers is expected to be strong, embedding earlier to link secondary school study with tertiary progression, including the promotion of no-ATAR and alternative entry pathways clearly, early and consistently.
- TAC resources and careers advice can also promote the concept of career paths that are non-linear, involving lifelong learning and ongoing skills development.

Q2. What are the tangible actions that can be achieved through the Roadmap to support parity of esteem between the VET and higher education sectors?

- TACs are well placed to leverage their existing connections and outreach activities, where there is alignment on agreed, consistent messaging to promote the value and comparability of both VET and HE pathways.
- Supporting more VET providers to participate with TACs provides students with a sector-agnostic 'menu' of course options across all sectors, rather than having higher education options through TACs perceived as the mainstream option, and VET study as a pathway requiring separate and individual applications.
- Understanding student aspiration and behaviour, and responding effectively to support students amidst a backdrop of global changes to the world of work related to AI and other factors. A joined-up approach to promoting and guiding students to tertiary study will be beneficial.

Q3. Noting fiscal constraints, how could existing funding settings and incentives be better aligned to support learner choice and labour market outcomes across VET and higher education?

- Shared services such as tertiary admissions centres provide value to the system amidst fiscal constraints.

- Better coordination between secondary schools and the joined-up tertiary system supports increased learner choice and agency. TACs currently facilitate this role comprehensively in relation to higher education and can be supported to uplift VET resource coordination and application, leading to more effective handover and connection between the secondary and tertiary systems.

Q6. What can VET and higher education providers do to better inform current and prospective learners of credit recognition arrangements and pathways?

- Tertiary admissions centres could be supported to develop resources and provide support to students navigating course options and transitions between VET and higher education. As trusted, impartial enablers of course entry, TACs are uniquely positioned to support applicants in navigating their path through a joined-up tertiary system.
- Providers can provide greater awareness of credit arrangements by actively promoting the availability of credit to applicants and prospective students more broadly.
- Both provider and TAC websites could be more effectively leveraged to promote awareness of credit arrangements.
- More consistent credit arrangements across providers (potentially via a national or state-based credit framework) would make the system easier to understand for students. Providers could also support state and national initiatives to provide comprehensive information and tools to prospective students to better understand their eligibility for credit from across providers and courses.
- Increasing tertiary harmonisation through a single point of application for VET and higher education courses should be a priority reform, with TACs as the natural central point. By design, this single point of course discovery and application would help raise awareness among students of the potential movements between VET and HE. Consideration could be given to maintaining flexibility where appropriate, such as utilising an 'opt-in' method similar to universities.
- TACs could also be the channel for packaging offers to HE courses that incorporate eligible credit at the point of offer, so students have certainty of the credit that has been granted before they enrol. For eg students who have completed a Diploma and who are applying for a Bachelor degree could receive an offer to the Bachelor with one year of credit already granted.
- Students applying for/transferring to HE courses with previous tertiary study could be targeted for specific promotional campaigns from multiple channels (govts, providers, TACs) about the potential for credit to be granted.

Q10. What does an ideal joined-up tertiary system look like?

- One in which there is an increased awareness of and aspiration for all types and forms of tertiary study and qualifications, and life-long learning, career shifts and skills development throughout the community.
- One that enables the secondary and tertiary education systems to work with industry and government to embed a capability recognition mindset and career support throughout learning, working and life.

Q12. What opportunities are there to improve Australia's data and information systems to better support learner pathways and outcome measurement across VET and higher education?

- Tertiary admissions centres are well-positioned to support data collation and exchange, and currently provide consolidated views of application and offer data for higher education and some VET courses. TACs could be supported to play a broader data coordination role across the tertiary sector.

For further information, please contact Kim Paino, Chief Strategy and Engagement Officer at UAC or Teresa Tjia, ACTAC Convenor and VTAC CEO.