

Universities Admissions Centre (UAC)

SUBMISSION

Response to the Common Terminology
Proposal

September 2017



Universities Admissions Centre

About us

The Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) Pty Ltd (UAC) 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 a strong culture of servicing the needs of all our stakeholders, in particular our institutions and applicants.

UAC has a trusted and valued position in the higher education sector. Applicants, in particular Year 12 students, turn to UAC for unbiased and authoritative information about university admissions and courses and for an easy interface with which to apply. Institutions rely upon UAC services to handle the bulk of the admissions process, allowing them to focus on their core capabilities of learning and teaching, research and community engagement. Parents, schools, the media and the general public know UAC as their first point of reference for university admissions in NSW and the ACT.

UAC is a member of the Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres (ACTAC), the group that facilitates communication and co-operation between tertiary admissions centres in Australia and New Zealand. UAC's Managing Director is the current Chair of ACTAC.



Feedback on the proposed admissions terminology

UAC is very supportive of the sector-led Admissions Transparency Implementation Plan and welcomes the development of the Common Terminology Proposal.

However, serious concerns must be raised regarding some of the proposed common terms.

Our concerns are specifically around the terms **“At school offer scheme/At school offer”** and **“ATAR-related adjustments or adjustment factors”**. In these cases we would argue strongly in favour of the retention of **“Early offer scheme”** and **“Bonus points”** respectively.

“At school offer scheme” is ambiguous and potentially misleading. Many of these offers are made when students are no longer in school.

“Early offer scheme” is well understood by prospective students and the school community for what it is – an offer of a place at university before results are available.

“ATAR-related adjustments” is deeply misleading as it suggests that a change is made to the ATAR itself. This is contrary to our consistent advice to students that their ATAR does not change even if they receive bonus points. The term “adjustment” is itself vague and unconvincing, and suggestive of a secretive, “behind-the-scenes” process completely at odds with greater transparency for students.

“Bonus points” is, like **“Early offer scheme”**, well understood by prospective students and the school community for what it is – a process by which you will be awarded some extra consideration in recognition of a personal achievement or circumstance. So entrenched is the term that any move away from it will be fruitless; just as the term “HECS” persisted in spite of efforts some years ago to kill it off, students will continue to say “bonus points”.

This is borne out by our survey of almost 500 people from a wide range of stakeholder groups (including Careers Advisers, university prospective student advisers and current and prospective students). Over 77% supported the retention of **“Early offer scheme”** and 65% supported the retention of **“Bonus points”**. Many also made the point that the end users of the terms should be consulted first about any change.

Some of the comments we received include:

“ATAR-related adjustments are not really adjustments to the ATAR, and expect to use the same term (bonus) to describe the various types of point schemes eg elite athletes, equity, subject etc.”

“Don’t mess with easy to understand terminology...the suggestions above would further confuse students & parents.”

“Please keep the current terminology, none of the proposed options are self-explanatory and students are confused enough. I am a careers advisor and see many students applying to university - the current terms are adequate and well understood.”

“Keep it simple to avoid any confusion. I think the original terms are self-explanatory and need no clarification unlike the new proposed terms.”

“Could benefit from having a communication person work on terms rather than industry experts. Sometimes, we’re biased by the information we know and take for granted. Changes definitely should NOT proceed as proposed.”

“‘Bonus points’ and ‘early offer schemes’ reflect simple language for Tertiary Education novices - keep it simple (and accessible).”

“To achieve the objective of clearer understanding of admissions, the terminology should be tested with the primary audience for which it is intended, to ensure it is easily understood and won’t be undermined.”

While UAC does not support proposed changes to **“Early offer schemes”** and **“Bonus points”**, we are supportive of other changes outlined in the Common Terminology Proposal including the replacement of **“Cut-off”** with **“Lowest ATAR/selection rank to which an offer was made”**. This change was supported by 57% of survey respondents, as it will “give students a clearer picture of their eligibility”, which of course was the starting point of the work of the Higher Education Standards Panel and the subsequent development of the Implementation Plan.