

Universities Admissions Centre (UAC)

SUBMISSION

Redevelopment and Audit of the
Higher Education Data Collection

Submission to HEIMs Data Collections
Discussion Paper

February 2018



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.



Executive summary

UAC supports the work of the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Human Services in working towards greater consolidation and efficiencies of the Higher Education Data Collection. As the largest tertiary admissions centre in Australia, UAC processes over 100,000 applications each year and currently provides all data associated with those to the Government for the national Data Collection.

UAC believes very strongly that there are further opportunities for government and the sector to work together to better harness student data.

Benefits would accrue to:

- current and prospective students, through improved information, advice and targeted support mechanisms (leading to higher student success rates)
- education providers, by being better prepared to support students throughout their education, and by having improved completion rates
- the government, through better informed policy and programmes and
- the public, by reducing the total cost associated with attrition and lower employment participation rates.

With the help of the tertiary admissions centres, an opportunity exists to consolidate admissions structures to enable the establishment of a data repository that would give a full sector view of school achievement, admissions, enrolments, progression, retention and attrition. An understanding of the complete student life cycle will enhance student experience and inform improvements in public policy and the delivery of learning and teaching across all levels of the education sector in Australia.

Single touch reporting

UAC supports the proposal for single touch reporting as a means of driving efficiency and allowing timely access to data for all stakeholders.

Question: How might we implement single touch reporting?

There needs to be a protocol established through which data at the provider (and/or tertiary admission centre) can be transferred to multiple government users without the need to re-enter the data into separate systems. This streamlining could be further enhanced by the use of tertiary admissions centres (such as UAC) as aggregators of provider data rather than each provider providing data separately.

Identifying students

It is vitally important that all the disparate elements currently identifying students are brought together into one identifier. This will allow not only great efficiencies for government and providers, but also allow deep analysis of the entire student life cycle.

Question: What is the most efficient way to identify higher education students throughout their study?

The Unique Student Identifier (USI) is the best way to identify students, but the proposal doesn't go far enough. To be of significant and enduring value the USI should include apply to all education and include:

- NAPLAN
- Year 12
- ATAR
- Admissions data
- VET and
- Higher education.

Reducing duplication

While UAC does not currently submit data to the Department of Human Services (DHS), discontinuing separate submission of data to the DHS is surely a necessary step in reducing the complexity and burden of the Collection, provided that the necessary data is collected through some mechanism.

Question: What challenges could there be in meeting these reporting requirements and how might we overcome them?

The challenges will be around rigorously establishing new data collection processes and protocols, ensuring that there are clear definitions, and that appropriate cyber-security measures are in place.

Relevance

Given that the Collection began over 30 years ago, elements are still being captured that are no longer relevant or useful. This Audit presents the opportunity to streamline the Collection and ensure that it's fit-for-purpose to meet current and future needs of government and the sector.

Question: Do you see value in retaining any of the elements discussed [on pages 8-12 of the Discussion Paper]?

No, most of these elements are no longer useful and removing them will simplify the Collection. The only exception is parental education attainment, which is useful for research purposes, and particularly so if it is enhanced to include gender.

Question: Are there other elements that no longer serve a purpose and so should be removed from the Collection?

UAC has no response to this question.

Question: Should the scope of the Collection be expanded to better identify Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in higher education?

Yes, the broader the scope of the collection in capturing all student attributes, the more useful the data will be in providing a holistic picture of student attainment and progression. There is an opportunity to go beyond WIL, and integrate with employment and other data where possible, again with the aim of enriching the data and the benefits that can be derived from it.

Question: What opportunities do you see for reducing the duplication of data across submissions?

UAC supports the proposal to collect enrolment and TFN data only at course commencement, and then update if necessary.

Low quality data

Lack of clarity around the interpretation of data elements makes the data hard to compare across providers and is out-of-step with broader moves by the government and the sector to make higher education data transparent and consistent. It is vitally important that clearly articulated, agreed standards are developed. Also vital is the implementation of an integrated VET/higher education Unique Student Identifier that, as described above, goes even further to cover all education from NAPLAN onwards.

Question: How can data quality be improved for these elements [on pages 13-17 of the Discussion Paper]?

UAC supports the proposals outlined in 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6. In 5.1 the alternative approach using PRISMS could be very useful in not only improving the quality of the data but also adhering to the overriding principle of single collection.

As regards 5.7, it would be very useful to know the basis on which students have been admitted such as special admissions schemes. While reporting adjustment factors will be helpful, it is not the full picture and special admissions schemes are not captured in adjustment factor data. There are a significant number of these schemes, and UAC typically makes offers to thousands of students each year under special admissions. In November 2017 we made offers to over 19,000 Year 12 students based on school recommendations.

Question: Is there value in maintaining the ATAR in the Applications and Offers submissions when it is also collected in the student enrolment data?

Yes. While the underlying aim of this review is to reduce duplication, the ATAR data is important to the separate analyses of both offers and enrolments. To capture it only at enrolment would mean that valuable data about student attainment in terms of receiving offers would be lost to the Collection, or at the very least make it more difficult to match the data subsequently.

Question: Are there other elements where a lack of clarity impacts on data quality and usability?

UAC has no further response regarding data quality.

Contact

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