THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Feedback on the Higher Education Standards Panel Consultation Paper, released 28 September 2022

HESP Consultation Paper: Next steps on improving the transparency of higher education admissions: *Extension to postgraduate courses and international students, Improving the transparency of ATAR reporting in course profiles*

Summary of the HESP's request for feedback

In 2022, HESP was set new objectives and tasks by the Minister for Education and Youth with the aim of further improving transparency on admissions terminology and requirements. An advisory committee has been established to assist HESP to develop its advice and a consultation paper has been sent to the sector asking for feedback on 7 proposed items. These items seek to extend more consistent and comparable information on admission requirements for prospective higher education students – they have been separated into 4 topic groups:

1. Extending data transparency to Postgraduate Domestic
2. Extending data transparency to Undergraduate/Postgraduate International courses
3. Requesting Minimum ATARs of previously enrolled students from providers
4. Other feedback

General feedback from The University of Sydney

The University of Sydney is, in-principle, supportive of the HESP's plan to improve the consistency and comparability of information on admission requirements for prospective higher education students, particularly for postgraduate courses and international applicants. The University already publishes information on PG domestic and UG/PG international courses on the Sydney Courses website and is well placed to enable reporting of the proposed additional information. However, we would like feedback as to what purpose this would serve if the information is simply another copy of what is already on our website where agents and prospective students already search for information.

Depending on the scope of the desired data to be published, there may be challenges that need to be addressed, especially if reporting requirements become broader than the initial examples provided in the appendix of the consultation paper. The initial Domestic Transparency changes for UG domestic courses were very prescriptive and more readily anchored to the existing ATAR-based requirements that are centrally managed by the Tertiary Admission Centres (TACs). Such groundwork does not exist for the PG domestic and UG/PG international cohorts and courses, as entry requirements are more varied between institutions. As such, we will be able to comment more confidently once precise requirements are provided as part of the Information Sets that determine the data/formats required.

We have included some of our recommendations in our **attached** submission and look forward to being involved in any future discussions.

For further information, in the first instance, please contact, Ms Wencong Chai, Director of Admissions, wen.chai@sydney.edu.au, 02 8627 8601.

1 November, 2022

HESP requests for feedback	
Page 3-4	**Background**
	In response to the 2016 Higher Education Standards Panel's (HESP) report, Improving the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions, sector stakeholders led development of and endorsed a national implementation plan in 2017, which was updated in 2018. The plan outlined six objectives:
	1 Consistent presentation of admissions information
	2 Adoption of common admissions terminology
	3 Revised ATAR-related thresholds and definitions
	4 Tertiary admission centres (TACs) to adopt more consistent approaches and reporting and streamline interstate application processes
	5 TEQSA monitoring and guidance on improved admissions transparency
	6 A new national admissions information platform (the Course Seeker website)
	These objectives have all been delivered – objectives 1-4 by providers and tertiary admission centres, objective 5 by TEQSA, and objective 6 by the Government in partnership with tertiary admission centres.
	The plan included an agreed initial approach to guide the presentation of admission information using common language, terminology, data definitions and ATAR-related measures. The plan defined two separate "information set" templates – one for whole of institution-level information about the provider's overall admission policies, and one for course or qualification-level information outlining any specific information and requirements relevant to each course. Together, these give applicants access to the full range of information they need to guide their choice of course and provider.
	University of Sydney feedback
	The University of Sydney and the sector have complied with the required terminology changes and provided transparency data across the four domestic undergraduate groups for four years now.

Consultation questions summary and University feedback		
	Questions	**Feedback**
Topic	**Inclusion of postgraduate courses**	
Pages 13-16	**Question 1.**	Rationale: can be found on page 13 of the consultation paper.
	Do you agree with the proposed two applicant grouping to target admission information to prospective postgraduate students? a. Completed higher education study, bachelor degree level or above b. Work, study and/or life experience.	*Feedback*
		• In a general sense, these two groups broadly work for The University of Sydney, but we need clarification in areas where some overlap between the two groups exist.
		• As with the previous admissions transparency exercise, terminology and standards applied must be adhered by all institutions to avoid any misrepresentation of entry requirements. This is particularly important

		where a PG Domestic applicant is applying based on an international qualification.
		• As with UG Domestic, we would also recommend excluding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cohort from any mandatory minimum results reporting.
		Potential challenges
		1. We have Domestic PG programs that require a combination of completion of a recognised degree, cognate field, relevant work experience, and/or a pre-requisite requirement. Having only the two applicant groups may not be sufficient to cover all scenarios. Confusion may be created if it is not made clear that the proposed groups are only broad groupings, rather than inclusive of all admissions requirements. Other factors such as quotas and GPA rankings may also affect how groups should be split.
		2. For assessment for PG admissions, statements around minimum entry should provide a precise definition of entry qualifications as per the Australian Qualifications Framework; e.g., a recognized Australian Bachelor degree or equivalent qualification, or an international Bachelor degree that is comparable to an Australian Bachelor degree standard.
		3. We need further clarification on work, study and/or life experience. How is this group precisely differentiable from Group A? Is it someone without a degree/qualification? What can be considered as life experience?
		Further, it is difficult to provide clear guidance for applicants who wish to apply solely based on work, study and/or life experience, as most offerings at USYD require an academic component of assessment or have very specific work-related entry requirements.
		Data that would be required - Basis of Admission - GPAs - Marking Schemes
Page 13	**Question 2.** What are your views on the proposed inclusion of information about the availability and allocation of Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) in postgraduate courses, which some students have indicated may assist in choosing the best course for their needs?	Rationale: can be found on page 13. *Feedback* As indicated on page 25: "Outline any general approach that applies to the availability of CSPs and the basis for allocation where a course is offered both as CSP and fee-based place. Where this general rule might differ for a particular course, that should be set out in the program/course information set

for that course". The HESP proposes that providers make clear in their admission information:

- whether there are Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) available for a course; and
- if so, set out or provide links to information about the basis on which those places are allocated.

In general, The University of Sydney already meets the requirement for publishing information on course pages indicating if a PG course has CSPs or both DFEE and CSPs available. In addition, our admissions team issues domestic offer letters with clear advice about whether the applicant is being offered a CSP or DFEE place.

We can support this request and add more information as per the sample from page 59 of Report template PDF

Commonwealth supported places
Domestic students may be able to undertake this course as a CSP. CSPs are available for this course. Only a limited number of CSPs are available in this course each year (around 10% of all places). CSPs are allocated on a competitive basis to those applicants with the highest undergraduate GPA.

CSPs are available for some PG courses, with the number of places and applicable courses varying each year, based on government funding. They are available in limited numbers and are allocated based on academic merit. On the basis of ranking, we can add more information to satisfy the above request. At the moment we have below information:

URL: https://www.sydney.edu.au/study/study-options/fees-and-loans/tuition-fees-for-domestic-students.html#csp

Potential challenges
In the Domestic PG domain, most of our courses have both CSP and DFEE places available, with our PG CSP numbers and applicable courses subject to variations in government funding. The University will need to have this information as early as possible to be able to update the availability of CSPs for different programs.

An example given on page 64 shows a detailed breakdown of fees. We need to investigate if this is also part of this proposal as our study pages have Year 1 indicative tuition fee*; if we are subject to publishing full duration fees, we need to work with relevant areas to update this. Sample: https://www.sydney.edu.au/courses/courses/pc/master-of-commerce0.html

Domestic students

Degree Structure and Indicative Tuition Fees		
Tuition Fee Per Subject		$3,125
Trimester	**Subjects**	**Fee**
1	3	$9,375
2	1 + 1 x Work Placement	$3,125 (no fee payable for Work Placement)
3	3	$9,375
4	3	$9,375
5	1 x Work Placement + Project Proposal and Ethics Approval if required	$0 (no fee payable)
6	Applied research project	$9,375
Indicative Total Tuition Course Fee*		$40,625

*Fees are for programs delivered in the year selected below and will expire on 31 December of each year. Fees are expressed in Australian Dollars (AU$). Fees are payable prior to each study period. Fees are reviewed annually and may be varied during the period of study.

Data that would be required
- Develop indicative CSP figure (potentially rolled forward, or est. percentage)
- Map allocation process for each course

Topic	Inclusion of information for international students

| Pages 16-18 | **Question 3.**

Do you agree with the proposed approach of integrating the minimum required admission information to enable course comparisons for international students without creating a separate applicant grouping? | Rationale: can be found on page 16.

Feedback
Integrating International admission requirements could be possible, but it comes with some challenges that would need to be resolved before we could commit completely. We have published minimum entry for each course where possible, so meeting the requirement as per the sample below (found on page 60) is not going to be a problem for Admissions:

Potential challenges
We have this information available already through Sydney Courses, so we can probably provide it. But we need to seek clarity about exactly what is needed in terms of what additional information we would be required to publish or report. If it is only the student profiles from the appendix (as below), we are well placed to provide it. |

Postgraduate students

Applicant background / Full year intake 2021	Australian		International	
	Number of students	Percentage of all students	Number of students	Percentage of all students
(A) Completed higher education study, bachelor degree level or above	592	65.0%	154	16.9%
(B) Work, study and/or life experience (Admitted on the basis of previous achievement not in the other category)	165	18.1%	-	0%
Australian students		757		83.1%
International students		154		16.9%
All students		*911*		*100.0%*

Notes: "<5" – the number of students is less than 5
N/A – Students not accepted in this category
N/P – Not published: the number is hidden to prevent calculation of numbers in cells with less than 5 students.

10. Student profile

The table below gives an indication of the likely peer cohort for new students in this course. It provides data on students who commenced in this course in the most relevant recent intake period, including those admitted through all offer rounds and international students.

Applicant background / 2021 full year intake	Australian students		International students	
	Number of students	Percentage of all students	Number of students	Percentage of all students
(A) Completed higher education study, bachelor degree level or above	84	30.1%	19	7.7%
(C) Work, study and/or life experience (Admitted on the basis of previous achievement not in the other category)	NAP	N/A	N/A	N/A
Australian students		84		81.6%
International students		19		18.4%
All students		103		100.0%

Notes: "<5" – the number of students is less than 5.
N/A – Students not accepted in this category
N/P – Not published: the number is hidden to prevent calculation of numbers in cells with less than 5 students.

Furthermore, if the goal is to also include information regarding minimum requirements, the international cohort presents some challenges, as the "means to fulfil academic requirements" will be different between institutions.

Each university uses its own weighting when converting an international qualification to a local mark equivalent, whether that is an ATAR equivalent or GPA/WAM equivalent. As every university gives its own weighting, to make

		them comparable you would require **every university** to provide **every minimum entry** to **every course** for **every possible qualification**.
		Because of the differences ways each institution converts overseas qualifications, requiring the publication of minimum entry requirements may not actually lead to greater transparency and accurate comparisons between providers' requirements. We therefore query whether the additional administrative costs for providers of complying with this proposal on an ongoing basis would be worth the benefit of the outcome that would be achieved.
		Data that may be required - GPA/ATAR equivalent cut-offs for each course - Basis of Admission - ATAR Equivalent for UG - GPAs and Marking Schemes for PG
Page 16	**Question 4.** Is it appropriate and workable to separate out different cohorts of international students in the student profile tables on the same applicant grouping basis as domestic students (higher education, VET, Recent Secondary, work and life experience, etc.), rather than a single figure for international students as in the current information sets? NOTE: If you are a provider, does your institution have data that would enable this approach?	*Rationale: can be found on page 16.* *Feedback* *These four UG and two PG groups broadly work as breakdowns for international applications to The University of Sydney, but fulfilling this would be labour intensive and if implementation would require additional resources to enable the provision of such data on an ongoing basis.* *Potential challenges* • *USYD may not be the most representative university on this subject, given that the vast majority of international entry to the university requires minimum academic performance in secondary schooling for UG or in a Bachelor's degree for PG.* • *System enhancements from other teams may be required to enable reliable reporting if this was implemented as proposed.* • *Ensure that HESP clearly communicates AQF rules, as not all international Bachelor degrees are weighted as Bachelor level in Australia.* *Data that would be required* • *Basis of Admission*

Page 16	**Question 5.** What are your views on the proposed: a) inclusion of offshore students in enrolment profiles where they are studying and engaging with onshore students on an equal basis; and b) exclusion of purely offshore course offerings, for instance courses offered at an overseas campus, as out of scope for this exercise?	Rationale: can be found on page 16. **Feedback** We believe that the proposed changes should apply to all students studying an Australian qualification. As such, this should include all offshore course offerings and enrolment profiles, rather than the exclusions recommended. If an overseas campus is offering an Australian qualification, then they should have the same reporting and requirements as those onshore. Consistency, compliance and rigour should be upheld even if the campus operates in another country. **Potential challenges** For USYD, Singapore Nursing is the only area we would need to account for - best to take advice from the faculty about which group they think it fits, and whether they think it's appropriate to include it or not. **Data that would be required** - Campus (in the event that more offshore campuses come online)
Topic	**Enhancing the reporting of ATARs for places offered to recent secondary students**	
Pages 18-20	**Question 6.** Do you see any difficulty with including the ATARs of all recent secondary students offered a place in the ATAR profile table for a course?	Rationale: can be found on page 18. *Feedback* - No major issues for the University of Sydney to provide the requested data for the UG Domestic cohort - We would recommend excluding the ATSI/Gadigal cohort from provision of results. This group typically contains the recipients with the lowest ATARs and including them in ATAR profiles would send false messages about the availability of courses to applicants outside of this cohort. *Challenges* - None at this time *Data that would be required* - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Status - ATAR

		- Current School Leaver/Recent School Leaver status
Topic	**Overall feedback on admissions transparency initiatives**	
Page 20	**Question 7.** Are there any other aspects of either the previously agreed common terminology definitions or information set specifications or the implementation of admissions transparency that you wish to provide comment on?	Rationale: can be found on page 20. **Feedback** - Is there any comment on English requirements for transparency as part of the international initiative? - Some institutions apply bonus points to international students/qualifications, how would that be monitored/reported? - How will students entering via articulation be measured/reported?

Ends/