

ACER: UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS FRAMEWORK PROJECT

FEBRUARY 2025





CONTEXT

Regional, rural, and remote students often face a different set of difficulties compared to their metropolitan peers when transitioning from high school into university, including (but not limited to):

- diminished opportunities for aspiration-setting,
- financial capacity/stability for the duration of their studies,
- the travel, accommodation, and employment requirements when relocating to study, and
- the general uncertainty/anxiety about tertiary education when coming from backgrounds with little-to-no academic role models.

Importantly though, regional university students consistently rank higher levels of satisfaction with their educational experience and record higher levels of employment and starting salaries, as graduates than compared to the sector average.

Regional universities seek to address the challenges of tertiary participation among the communities they serve by utilising early offers and school engagement frameworks to raise aspiration towards, and increase comfort and familiarity with, the higher education system. This submission seeks to highlight the practices and objectives common amongst many of RUN's members as part of their school engagement and early offer processes.

In developing of a consistent national approach to university admissions, it is important to consider the considerable differences that exist between the students of regional and metropolitan Australia, and the universities they rely upon. Any standardised approach to university admissions must provide nuanced recommendations that distinguish between regional and metropolitan contexts.

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RUN STUDENT PROFILE

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) represents the universities that host the nation's highest proportions of students from regional, low socio-economic status (SES), First Nations and disability backgrounds. As such, RUN universities are proactive in aspiration-building, school outreach and admissions practices that seek to increase the accessibility of higher education among all students, but particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds.

Despite this, young people from regional Australia continue to be less likely than their metropolitan counterparts to gain a tertiary qualification: in 2024, only 31 per cent of regional people aged 25-34 held a bachelor's degree or above, compared to 52 per cent in major cities¹.

In 2023, RUN enrolled 7 per cent of all domestic students aged 17-19 at Australian universities, yet enrolled:

- 19 per cent of all First Nations students aged 17-19,
- 24 per cent of all regional/rural/remote students aged 17-19,
- 15 per cent of all low SES students aged 17-19, and
- 8 per cent of all students living with disability aged 17-19.

In 2023, within RUN:

- 30 per cent of RUN students aged 17-19 were from low SES backgrounds,
- 5 per cent of RUN students aged 17-19 identified as First Nations, and
- 11 per cent of RUN students aged 17-19 live with disability.



¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2025, February 10). Education and work, Australia, May 2024: Highest non-school qualification: Bachelor's degree level or above (Table 34). (10 Feb 2025). <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/education-and-work-australia/latest-release#data-downloads>

EARLY OFFERS

Many RUN universities engage with early offer practices as part of a much broader suite of measures designed to increase higher education aspiration, participation, and attainment in regional areas, and among traditionally underrepresented student cohorts.

Early offers are an important aspiration-raising tool for universities who service schools and communities where there may be limited visibility of academic pathways. Early offers are an important method of working directly with school leaders, and the students they identify, to present highly supportive higher education opportunities/pathways that may not otherwise be considered, during important decision-making junctures in a students' life.

It is standard practice among RUN universities to only provide early offers from September of a student's Year 12 studies, following the

requisite identification/nomination from the School Principal and the completion of their final year studies.

It is important to note that all early offers are conditional upon the achievement of a certain Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), that is, students are still required to academically achieve to be entitled to their early offer.

School-engagement and direct aspiration-building activities are additional mechanisms that RUN universities utilise to engage and uplift students from as early as their primary school years. School aspirations are linked to early offers because a child's career development begins at a young age as they actively explore and construct possibilities for their future selves². It is important that career development discussions start in primary school, as it lays the foundation for future educational and career decisions.



² Mildred Cahill, and Edith Furey, *The Early Years: Career Development for Young Children*, (Toronto: CERIC and Memorial University, 2017) accessed 10 December 2023, www.cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/The-Early-Years-Career-Development-for-Young-Children-Educators-Guide-October-2017.pdf.

EARLY OFFERS

Motivation for early offers to students

RUN members consistently report several important benefits for students, and the institutions they enrol in, to the practice of early offers, including (but not limited to):

- **Reducing pressure/anxiety:** Early offers tend to provide year 12 students with a degree of confidence and reassurance about their 'next steps' as they move into their important final exams. By offering early certainty about university placement, the practice alleviates the stress that Year 12 students often face when waiting for offers, promoting a healthier educational experience. One RUN member articulates that there is a "*wealth of qualitative feedback from students who state that their early offer reduced anxiety around their HSC exams and their ATAR, enabling them to focus better on their exams and/or have more positive emotions about their final year of high school*".
- **Planning:** early offers in September not only provide students with a longer runway to consider their university options, but more time to plan for the financial, accommodation, employment, and transport requirements involved in having to relocate away from home environments and support networks to attend university. This is particularly pertinent for the students of regional Australia, where relocation for study is far more common: 56 per cent of regional students relocate for their studies, compared to just 13 per cent of metropolitan students³.
- **Aspiration-raising:** RUN universities who engage early with school Principals facilitate important aspiration-enabling conversations between students and school leadership at earlier junctures in schooling, allowing schools to better support the potential/aspirations of students who may not otherwise have predispositions to university attainment. This diminished predisposition results in 31 per cent of individuals aged 25–34 in regional areas holding a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 52 per cent in major cities⁴. Supporting this trend, out of all the students indicating aspirations for higher education, only 55 per cent of regional student's complete a bachelor's degree by the age of 24 in comparison to 68 per cent from metropolitan students⁵.
- **Diversified selection processes:** The Australian Universities Accord highlighted the correlation between ATAR and a student's socio-economic status, and advocated the need to expand selection process beyond tertiary admissions rank alone⁶. RUN universities, characterised by the largest proportions of students from low SES backgrounds, utilise early admissions processes that allows schools to nominate students with academic potential based on a holistic assessment of their achievements and potential, rather than solely on their ATAR.

³ Department of Education. (2020, June 10). Post-school education aspirations and outcomes. Australian Government. <https://www.education.gov.au/school-work-transitions/resources/post-school-education-aspirations-and-outcomes>

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2025, February 10). Education and work, Australia, May 2024: Highest non-school qualification: Bachelor's degree level or above (Table 34). (10 Feb 2025). <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/education-and-work-australia/latest-release#data-downloads>

⁵ Department of Education. (2020, June 10). Post-school education aspirations and outcomes. Australian Government. <https://www.education.gov.au/school-work-transitions/resources/post-school-education-aspirations-and-outcomes>

⁶ Department of Education. (2024, February 25). Australian Universities Accord final report. Australian Government. <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/final-report>

EARLY OFFERS

- **Motivation:** RUN members have found that students who have earlier opportunities to plan, prepare, or adjust their university aspirations are typically more likely to arrive at university with greater levels of motivation, confidence, and preparedness.
- **Resourcing:** Early offers allow smaller/ regional universities operating in sub-scale environments the ability to spread resource-intensive admission workload processes across slightly wider periods of time.

RUN universities place considerable value on the practice of early offers in the latter stages of a student's final year of high school,

as part of a broader suite of aspiration and participation setting activities. These activities work together to grow the tertiary attainment qualifications among the school-leaver cohorts within the (typically) underrepresented communities served by RUN universities.

A core component of the missions unique to regional universities relates to bridging the divide between the education outcomes of regional and metropolitan populations. It is important that every attempt is made to ensure those regional students who do have the capacity to succeed at university, receive the targeted support, encouragement and motivation to transition from high school to university.



EARLY OFFERS

Early offer processes

Targeted Student Cohorts

Like all universities, RUN universities only provide early offers from September onwards of a student's Year 12 studies, following the requisite identification/nomination from the School Principal, the completion of their final year exams, and conditional upon the achievement of a certain ATAR. This follows the Education Ministers' direction that university offers to secondary school students in 2025 and 2026 should not be issued before September in the preceding year⁷.

However, many RUN universities begin the process of schools-based engagement and aspiration-building in earlier years of schooling by building awareness of possible higher education pathways, scholarships, and employment outcomes.

Process and Incentives

RUN universities report a multitude of differing processes and incentives in their respective early offer programs.

In terms of informing prospective students about early offer processes (including application criteria, program guidelines, key dates and timeframes, and outcomes), almost all rely upon their school outreach and in-school activities including via School Principals and/or nominating teachers, who hold awareness of respective scheme guidelines and processes. RUN universities also utilise web-based information and application processes via institutional websites, online application portals, social media promotion/engagement, emails, and institutional student contact centres.

Bespoke early offer programs designed exclusively for First Nations students also exist within the RUN network. One example involves a five-day "Connections" program that includes free travel, accommodation, and meals to participants while they engage

with academic benchmarking activities, social/cultural activities, and other initiatives that seek to provide a strong foundation for the transition to study. The Program Directors offer customised advice to prospective students facilitating individual aspirations while incorporating culturally responsive perspectives.

Similarly, incentives directed towards the participants of early offer programs can vary between RUN institutions. Some may include:

- early invitations to apply for residential colleges (including, in some cases, modest student accommodation discounts),
- invitations to bespoke 'early entry welcome events', advice on equity group support networks and university clubs,
- information about student scholarships and other available supports, and
- tailored information describing 'student onboarding' activities/events/supports/resources.



⁷ Department of Education. (2024, February 23). National approach to early university offers. Australian Government. <https://ministers.education.gov.au/clare/national-approach-early-university-offers>

EARLY OFFERS

Eligibility and Suitability

It is important to note that where early offers are made, they are **conditional** offers whereby the applicant must achieve a specified ATAR to be guaranteed a spot in their desired course. Students who do not meet the ATAR requirement have their early offer rescinded but are typically offered alternative pathways by university staff into their desired course. These pathways could include enabling courses, providing opportunities to enter the desired program through different entry routes. Here, RUN considers the recent investments made by the Commonwealth in Fee-Free Uni Ready courses to be an effective and welcomed influence upon supporting greater numbers of underrepresented students towards success at university. Selection decisions, including explanations of why a student did not meet the cutoff and what alternative options are available, are often communicated via email. This ensures transparency and provides students with clear guidance on their next steps.

Generally, a students' eligibility is assessed based on Year 11 and 12 progress, determined through their predicted ATAR, similar to the processes used by the University Admissions Centre (UAC) for the School Recommendation Scheme (SRS). The predicted ATAR is then compared against the required ATAR cutoffs for undergraduate courses to determine initial eligibility.

For some institutions following initial eligibility determinations, evidence of the student's suitability for tertiary education must be provided through key school personnel, for example the School Principal, teacher, and/or student councillor. The evaluations consider the academic performance, motivation, talents, and potential for tertiary achievement of each individual student. To ensure fairness and consistency, there is a standardised and comprehensive set of guidelines for the key school personnel upon which to base their recommendations.



EARLY OFFERS

Benefits of early offers for schools, for students, and for universities

STUDENTS

The most impactful benefits that early offers provide students include:

1. Facilitating a smoother transition to university

A much higher proportion of RUN students fall into equity group categories as compared to sector averages, compounding the range of factors they must manage to achieve success at university. For instance, a regional student from a low SES background would benefit from having a longer runway to plan for a successful transition from school to university, including considerations linked to geographic relocation, employment, transport, accommodation, scholarship, and university (or community/cultural) support networks. The additional two-three month buffer time afforded by early offer practices ensures that such students are not forced into unfamiliar settings or rushed decision-making situations that may otherwise compromise their successful transition to university.

2. Supporting success and retention

Prospective students benefit from early offers by being afforded a degree of certainty and confidence around their future, much earlier than provided by conventional ATAR-admissions processes. The relative reassurance of an early offer can have positive impacts on a student's well-being during the stressful final aspects of their schooling, removing a key source of anxiety that otherwise accompanies their final exams.

RUN universities also report using the early offer period to identify and engage with students who are eligible for scholarships (or other supports) to support their transition to university.

This interaction is especially beneficial for regional students relocating to study, and/or students from low SES backgrounds, who tend to be more apprehensive about the feasibility of university study.

Early exposure to higher education opportunities also allows regional students more time to explore career options and academic pathways, fostering aspirations that might not have developed otherwise, while providing a tangible incentive to see Year12 to the end.

Regional students often are first in family university students which can impact their attitude towards education. In 2024, Year 12 attainment rates in regional areas were 77 per cent, compared to 88 per cent in metropolitan areas, which are likely to be a combination of factors like remoteness, social economic status, etc⁸. Despite the multifaceted factors influencing students' aspiration, RUN universities have recognised the essential commitment for additional aspiration-building initiatives to support regional students in completing year 12 and pursuing higher education.

One RUN university highlights a student's feedback on the impact of early offers:

"I loved that it was an early offer. We knew earlier in the year if we were accepted or not. I thrive off being organised, and after receiving the offer, I was able to make work and other plans for my first year of university. Receiving the offer early reduced my stress and allowed me to enjoy my last year of schooling."

3. Offering an alternative university pathway for students

Early offers create an alternative entry route for students who may not otherwise have access to tertiary education without

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2025, February 10). Education and work, Australia, May 2024: Attainment of Year 12 or equivalent (Table 18). <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/education-and-work-australia/latest-release#data-downloads>

EARLY OFFERS

bridging programs. Many students from low SES backgrounds and/or rural, regional, and remote areas are placed into non-ATAR pathways as early as Year 9, limiting their traditional university entry options. By offering an alternative method of applying to university, students with identified potential can use early offers to address these inequalities. Universities ensure that students from underrepresented backgrounds can access alternative admissions pathways.

SCHOOLS

Schools also benefit from increased engagement with universities afforded by early offers, enabling them to offer more informed, higher-quality support and guidance to prospective students. For instance, university-school engagement allows school principals to build early offers into academic performance plans, alternative pathways and incentivise attendance and behaviour standards for identified students, allowing them to better support student development.

RUN universities also report that many schools servicing underrepresented demographic regions derive reputational benefit based upon their students receiving early offers to university. This represents an important aspiration-signalling mechanism for many schools within the RUN network's catchment.

By fostering a structured approach to post-school planning, early offers enhance student satisfaction and helps to streamline school support services, making the transition to tertiary study smoother and more accessible.

UNIVERSITY

There are several benefits of early offers to RUN universities:

1. *Resourcing and Planning*

RUN members state that early offers generally lead to higher student conversion rates, as students who receive a university place in advance are motivated to stay committed to achieving the required ATAR and proceeding with

enrolment. This heightened conversion rate is particularly beneficial for the ongoing viability of smaller/regional universities operating within much thinner student markets (resulting in diminished economies of scale/higher per-student costs) compared to metropolitan institutions. Early enrolment commitments also provide universities with greater certainty in planning course delivery while considering factors such as small student cohorts, faculty recruitment/retention, practicum planning, or infrastructure maintenance planning.

2. *Streamlining enrolment processes*

Early offers provide universities with advance indications of commencing student numbers and intake performance. With a longer runway, universities can enhance the student experience by offering personalised enrolment support, tailored academic guidance, and detailed course information. This is particularly valuable for RUN universities, which serve a high proportion of underrepresented students who may benefit from additional support frameworks to sustain their ambition and aspirations. Early offers also enable universities to spread resource-intensive admission workload processes across slightly wider periods of time. Seizing these efficiencies in processes are vital to smaller/regional universities, who typically operate in sub-scale environments where issues relating to the viability of course delivery is a more common consideration.

3. *Enhanced student outcomes*

RUN members have stated that students admitted via early offer pathways tend to exhibit lower attrition and deferral rates, achieve similar or higher first-year Grade Point Averages (GPA) compared to non-early offer school leavers, have higher rates of first-year success/progression, and also convert from offer-to-enrolment at higher rates than non-early offer school leavers.

EARLY OFFERS

4. *Earlier, targeted support –*

Early offers result in earlier university-student interactions. For RUN universities servicing large cohorts of underrepresented students, this means that personalised supports can be identified and implemented well in advance of study commencement, leading to better student success outcomes.

5. *School engagement*

The practice of early offers is not the only mechanism that regional universities deploy to develop meaningful relationships with local schools on joint aspiration-building activities, but it is nonetheless an important mechanism that exists to identify and support academic talent that may not otherwise pursue university studies.



EARLY OFFERS

Disadvantages of early offers

RUN members report that the advantages of early offers (to students, schools and universities) far outweigh any drawbacks. Nonetheless, a number of considerations can be made:

1. Disengagement with Year 12 syllabus

Some argue that Year 12 students could disengage from their studies after receiving an early university offer, potentially becoming complacent. However, this concern is effectively mitigated by the timing and conditions set by RUN universities for their offers and scholarships. Early offers are only made once students have completed their classwork, ensuring they remain focused throughout the academic year.

Additionally, these offers come with conditions requiring students to meet the ATAR thresholds for their selected course, reinforcing the importance of continued academic effort. Scholarships further incentivise strong ATAR performance, encouraging students to remain committed to their studies and strive for the best possible results. Because early offers are conditional, there is no reward for students to disengage with their school studies.

2. Inconsistency in Evaluating Student Suitability for Tertiary Education

The recommendations of student potential by school principals involves a degree of subjective judgement, and as such, there is potential for inconsistent outcomes. However, this is mitigated by our members through rigorous and continued engagement with schools and teachers throughout the process to guarantee their accurate and genuine support for a student's application for the application to progress.

3. Credibility of predicted ATAR

ATAR prediction may not always be 100 per cent precise, with potential for differing predicted and actual ATARs. The actual ATAR is based on a scaling mechanism which changes every year depending on the academic ability of students in each course. This means that the predicted ATAR uses previous year's scaling and may not predict precisely how marks will be scaled in the examination year.

Additionally, predicted ATARs can be affected by small sample sizes and the large range of marks achieved by students studying courses with small cohorts, further reducing the accuracy of the estimate. However, the variability in perceived vs actual ATAR appears to be small/rare, with one RUN member stating that the difference remains within just one-to-two percentage points year on year.

The possibility for discrepancies between actual and predicted ATAR does have the potential to negatively impact upon students: if a student receives an early offer based on a predicted ATAR without understanding the possible discrepancies, they may develop a false sense of security, only to be disappointed if their actual ATAR falls short. RUN universities attempt to mitigate this by continually engaging in open dialogue with schools to give full transparency about early offer processes and practices.

EARLY OFFERS

Impact that early offers have on student wellbeing, engagement and/or learning outcomes

Qualitative data collected by RUN members demonstrate a wealth of positive impacts of early offers upon student well-being. For instance, student testimonials include:

"Once I was accepted into the program, I felt an incredible sense of relief, especially since it was just a week or so before my HSC exams. Having that security meant I could focus on my studies without the constant pressure and anxiety about what would happen after the exams. The peace of mind knowing that I had a place at university already made a huge difference for my mental health during such a stressful time". - Caitlin, Bachelor of Education (Primary).

"Year 12 students should apply for this experience as you not only get to have the stress and pressure taken off you from your HSC exams, but also being able to communicate with others who would be attending the university with you and being able to talk about this new experience with them as well". - Poppy, Bachelor of Nursing.

Other member feedback indicates that high schools are effectively assessing their students for academic potential, as those admitted through early offer schemes tend to succeed and thrive in university.

RUN universities report that students admitted via early offers have higher-than-average offer-to-enrolment conversion rates, and better progress rates compared to non-early entry students. Additionally, these students achieve similar, or higher first-year GPAs compared to non-early offer school leavers.

This evidence underscores the effectiveness of early offers in supporting student success and wellbeing.



UNIVERSITY ADMISSION PROCESSES

How admissions practices support or impede students in making informed choices

SUPPORT

Current admissions practises support students to make informed choices through transparency, efficient communication of information and support networks.

RUN members align current admissions practises to the requirements set out under the guidance note issued by the Admission Transparency by Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) to provide comprehensive information with regards to course selections, course content, student satisfaction with courses, and potential career outcomes⁹. Information outlining the academic and non-academic requirements that all students need to meet to achieve the course learning outcomes can easily be accessed on university websites.

In addition, RUN universities also offer personalised guidance through free career counselling to prospective students to align their strengths and career aspirations to their course selections at the start of their higher education journey. This goes hand in hand with pre-offer strategies such as a school validated predicted ATAR and post ATAR release validation to ensure students are admitted to the course type (pathway, Diploma or Bachelor) to support their success. RUN universities continue to support students through First Year Support programs and other teaching frameworks.

If unsuccessful in their initial application, students are offered entry into pathway programs such as Tertiary Preparation Pathways and pathway diplomas.

IMPEDIMENTS

RUN is a consistent advocate for the need to raise greater awareness and aspiration-building towards higher education, particularly among underrepresented students. This approach aligns with the Australian Universities Accord recommendations, which focussed on expanding opportunities for all by improving access to career information and guidance¹⁰.

Students in regional areas often rely upon proximal influences such as family, peers, school and community, and the media, which work to shape their educational and career aspirations¹¹. However, there is currently no national requirement for career guidance to be delivered by qualified professionals within Australian schools, leading to inequities and/or inconsistencies in the support available to regional students. While high-quality advice can be provided by various stakeholders (schools, universities, registered training organisations, TAFEs, employers, employment services, industry organisations, private career advisors, state and territory governments, and the Australian Government's National Careers Institute) these efforts are often fragmented, as different states and territories have distinct frameworks, and stakeholders operate with differing motivations.

As a result, regional students, who may be less familiar with the higher education system, face greater challenges in accessing career advice and navigating their academic and career pathways. Additionally, regional students are more likely to use non-traditional methods to qualify for university, therefore there needs to be more support and promotion of alternative pathways into higher education to guide students.

⁹ Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. (2021). Guidance Note: Admissions transparency. TEQSA. Retrieved February 12, 2025, from <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/guides-resources/admissions-transparency>

¹⁰ Department of Education. (2024, February 25). Australian Universities Accord final report, Chapter 3. Australian Government. <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/final-report>

¹¹ Ibid

UNIVERSITY ADMISSION PROCESSES

To address this, career guidance should be standardised and strengthened not only within schools but across all life stages. This would ensure that individuals receive informed,

consistent advice on how to maximise their higher education outcomes and support at critical transition points throughout their educational and career journeys.

Beyond ATAR assessment of student preparedness for admission to a course of study

The assessment of 'student preparedness for admission' strictly follows the guidelines and protocols set in place by regulatory frameworks (for instance, those regulated by TEQSA and contained within the Higher Education Threshold Standards, the Higher Education Support Act 2003, and or the Higher Education Provider Guidelines 2023).

In the case of school-leavers from early entry pathways, these regulatory frameworks are complimented by the advice/recommendations of School Principals as they relate to individual student applicants. RUN universities generally place considerable weight upon recommendations provided by school leadership, for two main reasons. Firstly, school leaders have built up years of understanding of an individual student's aptitude and motivation for learning and arguably hold a more-informed assessment of a departing students' characteristics than any other source. Secondly, early entry students display higher progress rates compared to those admitted through other pathways, lower rates of

attrition, similar or higher first-year GPAs, and have higher offer-to-enrolment conversion rates, demonstrating the general effectiveness of talent identification by school principals.

Beyond ATAR, other factors relating to 'student preparedness for admission' may be considered, for instance:

- Whether course/subject prerequisite requirements have been met.
- Whether English language proficiency requirements have been met by students from non-English speaking backgrounds.
- Whether the additional requirements of specific/highly-competitive courses such as referee reports, aptitude tests, interviews or employment experience criteria (categorised according to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations) have been met.
- Whether student performance while undertaking enabling/preparatory courses meets the requirements for admission to undergraduate studies.

The impact that direct entry processes have on student learning outcomes, including withdrawal/retention rates and academic performance

Evidence from RUN universities indicates that students admitted via early offer pathways tend to exhibit lower attrition and deferral rates, achieve similar or higher first-year GPAs when compared to non-early offer school leavers, have higher rates of first-year success/progression, while also converting from offer-to-enrolment at higher rates than non-early offer school leavers. Of the available data, early offers appear to have a positive influence on student retention and long-term academic performance.

In terms of broader direct-entry pathways (not necessarily early offers for school leaver cohorts), the feedback from within RUN indicates a similar trend: that the progression rates/attrition rates seem to be positively favoured towards direct-entry pathways.

UNIVERSITY ADMISSION PROCESSES

Personalised guidance on alternative pathways to unsuccessful direct entry applicants

A student's direct entry application may be deemed unsuccessful for a variety of reasons: for instance, as a result of not meeting the ATAR threshold, or failing to satisfy prerequisite subjects or English language requirements. In these instances, it is common practice amongst RUN universities for the student to be engaged in a personalised process of identifying alternative, supported pathway programs that will develop the requisite study/academic skills/GPA, giving them achievable opportunities to eventually meet the entry requirements of their desired initial course preference.

Typical engagement with an unsuccessful applicant will outline the reasons why eligibility criteria for their chosen course was not met, and a discussion of how alternative pathways can help with the eligibility for future admission. Additionally, students will be provided with access to support networks, including career counsellors and relevant resources, to guide them in their academic and career progression.



UNIVERSITY ADMISSION PROCESSES

Equitable admissions practices for students from low SES backgrounds, regional and remote areas, students with disability and First Nations students

RUN universities enrol the highest proportions of students from underrepresented backgrounds within the sector. As such, RUN universities have developed best-practice activities and initiatives that seek to raise tertiary aspiration, participation and attainment among students from equity backgrounds. This includes best practice for admissions processes, noting that RUN admissions teams will only admit students if there is a firm belief that the students have a reasonable chance of success in their studies.

There are opportunities to reduce barriers to university study, including investing heavily in aspiration raising activity, and the provision of accessible and appropriate student supports. RUN universities suggest a variety of proven initiatives:

1. Alternative admission pathways

RUN members recognise the need to decentralise the use of ATAR as the sole factor of a student's higher education prospects. Interviews and portfolios can be complimentary mechanisms to form a more holistic view of a student's circumstances, while FEE-FREE Uni Ready Courses will allow more students from equity backgrounds alternative pathways to higher education participation and attainment.

2. Career Guidance

Should be standardised and strengthened within Australian schools, and indeed, throughout lifelong learning. This would result in students receiving consistent, high quality advice on their higher education (or vocational) opportunities and confidently build aspiration and awareness.

3. Outreach

Expanding school-based outreach and engagement activities targeting underrepresented students/communities and providing greater support to those universities performing the heaviest lifting would drive stronger outcomes among underrepresented groups.

4. Student support

Early interventions and implementations of supports, particularly amongst students from underrepresented backgrounds, can occur via scholarships, application fee waivers, accommodation assistance, or proactive engagement with university clubs/social supports. However, those smaller/regional universities with the greatest demand for such interventions are often the most constrained due to their sub-scale operational environments.

5. Cultural/community support

Embedding cultural and community supports within admissions and transition programs can remove barriers and build familiarity with university for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

The ideal solution for equitable admissions practises is a combination of competent identification of prospective higher education students, subsequent personalised assistance and utilising alternative admission frameworks when appropriate, followed up by sustained exposure to support services. A nationally consistent approach to admissions that adequately distinguishes the different needs, backgrounds and characteristics that exist between regional and metropolitan cohorts would also yield more equitable dividends for those living outside our largest cities.



**For further information please contact
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