

## Means of Admission to University Courses

There has been some press coverage early in 2007 about problems with admission to university courses largely focussing on universities using means other than the UAI to make decisions about offers of places.

The UAI does serve as a good indicator of success in higher education studies. Recent work at UTS has confirmed that there is a linear relationship between marks in universities courses at first-year and the entering UAI. Of course there is considerable scatter with some students entering with >95 UAI gaining a WAM (weighted average mark =  $\Sigma (\text{Credit points} \cdot \text{Mark}) / \Sigma (\text{Credit points})$ ) of <10 and students with UAI scores in the 70s scoring WAMs of >80. With UAIs in the 60s and 70s, the correlation with university marks is not strong but at UAI score >80, the relationship is essentially linear.

Recently UTS examined the performance of recent school leavers who entered via access schemes that allowed admission with a UAI somewhat lower than the normal cut-off. This study confirmed the predictive power of the UAI, in that students entering via access schemes fared slightly worse in terms of success rate (defined as Credit points passed / Credit points attempted) and WAM than those students whose UAI were above the cut-off.

That universities, or faculties within universities, want to use means other than the UAI to make decisions about offering places to students is not in itself a problem. It may be academically justified to use other indicators that are stronger predictors of students success. For example, performance in 3- and 4-unit maths may be a better predictor of success in engineering courses than the UAI alone. On the other hand, good performance in extension English and history subjects may indicate a high likelihood of success in humanities courses at university. There should not be any objection to using further indicators in making decisions about offering places in university courses. However, a guiding principle should be that the additional indicators are academically justified, just as the use of the UAI is justified because it does predict student success in higher education well. Further, any selection processes should be transparent and well-publicised. Everyone understands about the use of the UAI, and in the cases (art courses, for example) where additional processes are used for selection (interview, portfolio etc).

What appears to be occurring at the moment is that certain courses in universities are using other means to make selections that may not be transparent and well understood by prospective students. There is the risk that some prospective students could be disadvantaged in the current environment. For example, a student may inspect the previous year published UAI cut-off for a course and believe that they would not gain that UAI thus not listing the course as a preference, whereas in fact their UAI might be quite “competitive”, taking account of other criteria / processes that might be applied.

Academic Boards / Senates are responsible for admission policy. As the Chairs of Academic Boards / Senates, we should confirm that we agree with universities using other instruments of course selection, preferably in addition to, rather than to the exclusion of, the UAI, as long as the process can be defended on academic grounds and that the process is well-publicised eg through the UAC entry for the course in the UAC annual handbook.

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