ACPET Response to the VTAC Strategic Directions Discussion Paper

September 2010
The Australian Council for Private Education and Training

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Discussion Paper - VTAC Strategic Directions (July 2010).

Established in 1992, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) is the national industry association for private providers of post-compulsory education and training. ACPET has over 1,100 members nationally delivering a full range of higher and vocational education and training (VET) and English language courses across all States and Territories.

ACPET’s mission is to enhance quality, choice, innovation and diversity in Australian education and training for individual, national and global development. ACPET works with governments, education and training providers, industries, and community organisations, to ensure vocational and higher education and training services are well-targeted, accessible, and well-delivered with courses of high quality, and providing for choice and diversity.

Response to questions raised in Discussion Paper

ACPET has considered the information circulated by VTAC in its discussion paper stemming from the recommendations proposed in the two reports provided by PhillipsKPA and the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) at the University of Melbourne. In this paper ACPET outlines its response to the questions raised in the paper on behalf of its members.

Question 1.1
ACPET supports new operating principles aimed at increasing flexibility and the range of services offered by VTAC whilst, at the same time, remaining cost effective for institutions. In particular it supports the principle that “VTAC will support institutional diversity”. Non-public tertiary education providers deliver almost the full range of accredited AQF qualifications, from apprenticeships to traineeships to post graduate qualifications across a diversity of disciplines, with a wide range of operating systems: therefore a flexible tertiary admissions system that takes into account the variety of the institutions is of the utmost importance. Due to this diversity, ACPET also supports the principle that institutions retain autonomy for selection decisions, and the criteria employed for making decisions.

Question 1.2
Nil
Question 1.3
ACPET supports VTAC providing a year round application service as a general concept. Due to the variety in its membership, a more flexible selection approach would be of interest to most ACPET members, subject to certain conditions (refer to Q.2.3 and 2.4 below).

Question 1.4
ACPET suggests that VTAC’s application service should be extended to include VET courses at Certificate III level.

ACPET takes this opportunity to point out that the VTAC discussion paper refers to “TAFE Applicants” and “TAFE courses”. This terminology excludes the courses offered by private providers. The majority of VET delivered in Victoria is done so by private providers¹, accordingly ACPET therefore recommends that the term “VET” (“VET applicants” and “VET courses”) be used, which would adequately resolve this issue, as the term encompasses ALL vocational education providers, public and private.

Question 2.1
ACPET members would prefer to continue with option 2, with two rounds of offers and the additional in-built flexibility of making offers directly to applicants after the January round, as well as having the option of participating in the VTAC second round. This system would provide a deadline for students to make their final decision to accept an offer, rather than postponing the decision.

Question 2.2

Question 2.3
ACPET is in favour of increasing the number of offer rounds for applicants; however VTAC should be able to deal only with new applicants at every round.

Question 2.4
ACPET suggests that very strict rules and penalties should be imposed around institutions not selecting students from previous offer rounds. This would undermine the process, and lead to unfair selection practices.

Question 2.5 - 2.7
Due to the diversity in the ACPET membership, there are variations in the selection processes adopted by the institutions. ACPET therefore suggests that a new system be trialled for a defined time period and then reviewed.

ACPET suggests that for those institutions that rely solely on the ENTER score for their selection, restrictions should continue on Year 12 early offers. Those institutions that do not rely solely on the applicant’s ENTER score (but have additional selection criteria such as folio presentation), should have the opportunity to make early offers for semester 1 courses.

¹ WHK Horwath Education industry Survey 2010
Question 2.8
Nil

Question 2.9
Refer to above (Q. 2.5-2.7)

Question 2.10
ACPET is of the opinion that the current restrictions regarding offers to direct applicants should not be removed. This is based on the following reasons:
- The proposed process would undermine the current protocols and system of preferences, with a possible confusing and chaotic outcome.
- VTAC is a centre for the admission of students into tertiary institutions. The proposed change would imply that VTAC would no longer act in this capacity, but become simply a database for tertiary institutions to access.
- Participants in the VTAC system should participate in the appropriate processes. Should they not wish to participate, they have the option to opt out. TAFE institutes “which currently fill most of their courses through direct applications” (p6) have the choice to opt out of the current VTAC system and deal directly with the applicants.

Question 2.11 & 2.12
Nil

Question 3.1
ACPET does not support the development of centralised assessment through VTAC (as proposed on p. 7 of the discussion paper). ACPET is in favour of individual institutes retaining their own right to assess, and then select students according to their own individual criteria, which may vary marginally according to decisions based on institutional experience. Centralising this process may mean that the assessment, and resulting applicant selection, may not be done by VTAC according to the full interpretation of the institute.

Question 3.2
Nil

Question 4.1
ACPET supports the continued provision of the centralised SEAS and Scholarship services.

Question 4.2
ACPET suggests that the SEAS application process should be more streamlined so that less paperwork is required and so as to remove duplication with the course application. This process will need to be reviewed when the Victorian Student Number system will be introduced in the future.

Question 5.1
ACPET does not agree that institutes should communicate with their applicants throughout the application/offer process. The point has already been made in response to Q. 2.1 that
VTAC is the centre for the admission of students into tertiary institutions. If participating institutions wish to communicate with their applicants, this option already exists outside the VTAC system.

**Question 5.2**
Nil

**Question 6.1**
ACPET strongly agrees that institutions should maintain ownership of their own courses and should be able to provide descriptors that support diversity and appropriately reflect the nature of the individual courses offered. Therefore institutions should have a greater degree of autonomy over their course descriptors than they currently have. For institutes that offer VET courses based on training packages, the descriptors may be basic. However institutes that deliver their own specialised and innovative accredited courses would welcome the opportunity to provide more detailed course descriptors that best represent the uniqueness of their course offerings.

**Question 6.2**
ACPET suggests that either the full copy of the hard version should be completely transferred to a web version, alternatively it should be maintained in the current hard copy format.

**Question 6.3**
The hard copy Guide is comprehensive and informative as it is. ACPET suggests that it should continue in the current format.

**Question 6.4**
Nil

**Question 6.5**
ACPET would like to commend VTAC on the introduction of new services to automatically advise applicants regarding additional information and forms that may be required for their course preferences, and about upcoming cut off dates. In addition to this service, ACPET suggests that consideration should be given to extending the sms messaging system to applicants.

**Question 7.1**
ACPET members offer a great diversity of courses and qualifications. Over the years, institutions have developed their own particular selection criteria and processes in order to efficiently and effectively select the most suited students to their courses. In addition, the current system allows for individual special consideration of applicants, which is a very important aspect that will be lost through the ‘tertiary selection framework’ proposed in the discussion paper. ACPET therefore is not in favour of the proposed ‘tertiary proposed selection framework’, and argues that the current role of VTAC should be maintained.
Question 7.2
ACPET is not in favour of supporting the centralised collection by VTAC of all selection information required by institutions, as proposed in the discussion paper.

Question 7.3
ACPET reiterates that it views the role of VTAC predominantly an admission system that supports the institutions in the selection of their own students, not as a full student processing centre. ACPET is not in favour of the mandatory publication of the institutions’ complete selection criteria in detail as proposed.

Question 7.4
The current practice adopted by VTAC in relation to the specificity of scores, weightings and quotas should not be changed.

Question 11.1
ACPET represents a large number and a wide range of private educational institutions in Victoria, some of which are already serviced by VTAC, other which may have an interest in the services provided by VTAC.
ACPET therefore welcomes the opportunity to develop a closer relationship with VTAC and invites VTAC to engage directly with ACPET members through one or two yearly seminars/workshops.
In order to strengthen this relationship further, ACPET suggests that private education sector should be represented on the Board of Trustees. In addition equal representation should be given to the private education sector through ACPET (in terms of number of representatives) on the VTAC Management Committee.

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