

19 February 2025

Submission in response to national university admissions research

About QTAC

QTAC is the trusted leader in tertiary admissions in Queensland. For 50 years, QTAC has offered a central access point for higher education applicants in Queensland, providing institution-agnostic information and advice to applicants from across the state and further afield.

QTAC is also trusted by 17 tertiary institutions from across Queensland and Northern New South Wales to administer applications, conduct assessments, and issue offers on their behalf.

As a key contributor to the university admissions ecosystem, QTAC is pleased to engage with the national research on university admissions processes.

Early offers

As the key conduit for tertiary admissions and advice in Queensland, QTAC's stated mission is to "connect people with organisations that offer professional and personal learning opportunities, helping them thrive in an ever-changing environment".

Early offers largely complement this mission, given their applicant-centric nature and their responsiveness to the changing patterns and preferences of tertiary education consumers.

QTAC utilises the term "at-school offer" to refer to early offers made to Queensland Year 12 students before they receive their ATAR and prior to the first main round of the admissions cycle in December each year. For the purposes of this submission, an at-school offer is an offer that may be made as early as 1 September and is considered conditional, contingent on the student completing Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) requirements and any other conditions specified by the institution.

We primarily discuss the experience in Queensland, with the expectation that it will serve as a useful case study for this national consultation process.

At-school offers have grown significantly in Queensland over the past five years, rising from 5,225 offers in 2021, to 8,540 in 2025. Outright acceptances of these offers have grown in line with the trend, with 3,313 acceptances in 2021 (63% of offers) and 6,340 in 2025 (74%). While at-school offers are made across most fields of education, four fields have dominated across the five years of at-school offers in Queensland: in order, society and culture (law, economics, psychology), health, management and commerce, and creative arts.

To put these numbers in perspective, **Figure 1** provides a comparison of at-school offer volumes compared to all Year 12 offers for the corresponding year, across a five-year period. In 2025 (YTD), at-school offers represented 27.15% of all Year 12 offers; this reflects a similar trend in 2024 (25.69%).

Figure 1: QTAC at-school offers, Year 12 offers, and all offers comparison 2021-2025

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
At-school offers	5,225	5,045	5,230	8,195	8,541
All Year 12 offers	32,677	32,734	31,730	31,888	31,450

Each participating Queensland university has its own timelines and approaches for administering at-school offers, with some preferring to make offers as early as possible (i.e. September) and others holding off until later in the admissions cycle and observing a moratorium on applicant communications during final exam periods. This is reflective of the diversity of institutions in Queensland and the broad range of students they serve.

In discussing at-school offers, it is worth breaking down the benefits and disadvantages separately for each stakeholder group, from QTAC's perspective.

Advantages

Applicants

For Year 12s who might be considering relocating or moving out of home to attend university (particularly regional students), anecdotal evidence based on QTAC customer interactions indicates that securing an at-school offer can allow more time for consideration of accommodation, transport, and part-time work options to support students' transition to tertiary education.

At-school offers also allow Year 12s to "lock in" a university offer ahead of time, be it their first preference or a "back-up" course. This can reduce stress for Year 12 students at a critical time, allowing these young people to focus on their learning and final examinations without added mental health pressures.

While it is true that some applicants conditionally accept an at-school offer as a back-up course, with little intention of final acceptance of that offer, there is a clear applicant benefit in knowing that a tertiary place is secured, even if a more competitive course placement is desired in the long term.

Schools

At-school offers may assist schools in more effectively supporting their students. For example, once a student has an offer "in hand", their school can more effectively support their transition to tertiary education through advice, assistance, and career guidance.

Universities

Queensland's tertiary sector is diverse and it should be noted that not all Queensland institutions participate in at-school offers. For those that do, at-school offers provide an opportunity to gauge demand for undergraduate courses early, helping with resource planning and capacity management. This is important, given that many undergraduate courses admit both Year 12 and non-Year 12 applicants. Participating in at-school offers allows universities to contend with demand from both cohorts at the same time, rather than await the release of ATAR to engage school-aged applicants.

Equally, at-school offers enable universities to “lock in” student enrolments earlier, providing more time to build relationships with these students through marketing, orientation, and support activities, increasing the likelihood of student retention.

Disadvantages

Applicants

To be eligible to receive an at-school offer for a given course, a student must preference that course “first” in their QTAC application. In many cases, a student may be eligible for another course in their preference list (potentially with a higher eligibility threshold) that is better suited to their capabilities and future career ambitions. However, a failure to re-order preferences by the appropriate date would mean the student is “locked in” to their at-school offer. More timely information and advice can prevent this scenario from occurring, however there is little incentive for the first-preferenced institution to dissuade students from foregoing their initial at-school offer.

Conversely, not all early offers translate to being a “final” offer, although the conversion rate from at-school offer to enrolment is steadily increasing. In 2021, the average rate of outright acceptance (which constitutes a final offer) of at-school offers was 63% across all participating institutions; in 2025, the average rate was 74%, which is similar to the average acceptance rate of all offers for 2024/25 at time of writing.

However, we do see institution-specific conversion rates between at-school offers and final acceptances being as low as 53%, which indicates that Year 12 applicants to some institutions may use at-school offers as a back-up option. For institutions with lower conversion rates, this could lead to inefficient resource allocation by these institutions and their corresponding TACs in administering at-school offers.

At present, not all courses are eligible for at-school offers, particularly those with an eligibility component beyond ATAR, such as auditions, portfolios, or additional testing, and some institutions choose not to participate. This can limit the appeal or accessibility of early offers for some students.

Schools

While there has been recent public discourse suggesting that at-school offers can have a detrimental impact on student motivation (and on final examination results), the fact remains that at-school offers are contingent, among other criteria cited above, on a student successfully completing Year 12, which can incentivise completion and effort.

Universities

Under present conditions, at-school offers can be difficult to administer for universities and TACs alike, as these offers are often made before finalised results are available. This can create challenges in ensuring students meet the necessary requirements for their chosen course, and can lead to inadvertent over-subscription to quota courses that have a finite number of work placement slots available to students.

Further complexity arises from the diverse ways in which at-school offers are administered. While QTAC administers a large number of at-school offers on behalf of institutions, many are offered “directly” by institutions to students, or via white-label services from other third-party providers, which gives QTAC limited visibility of course enrolment activity and therefore hinders our ability to effectively administer

offers for a given course. It is our view that at-school offers work best when administered centrally by each state-based TAC to bring coherence to the process.

Access to information

At-school offers were introduced relatively recently in Queensland, and the processes surrounding them are still evolving. As the system matures, more streamlined and consistent methods of communication, and more uniformity in timelines and processes, can only assist applicants in more effectively navigating the at-school offer ecosystem.

Currently, each participating university is responsible for promoting and providing information about their at-school offer requirements via their own channels (e.g. website, course guide) including eligibility criteria and application procedures.

While QTAC, in most cases, is responsible for facilitating at-school offers, much of the supporting documentation and communications are handled directly between the applicant and the university, which means students are navigating multiple processes simultaneously. Again, there is an argument for greater centralisation of the process via the state-based TAC.

Suggested improvements

Centralisation of processes

For at-school offers to work effectively, they should be conducted in a manner consistent with other centralised admissions processes. This would require greater uniformity in requirements, procedures, and timelines across institutions to ensure transparency and simplicity for all stakeholders, including students, schools, universities, and TACs. Ultimately, more equitable access to opportunities for Year 12s should be the overarching goal.

QTAC is currently working with its Queensland university partners to agree a standardised “rules of engagement” around administering at-school offers to ensure clarity for applicants and fairness for tertiary providers. It is anticipated that this will be in place for the 2025/26 admissions cycle.

Equity focus

At-school offers may be more difficult to navigate for applicants from diverse backgrounds, who may have less social capital, support, and/or history of family participation in tertiary education. So as not to perpetuate disadvantage, TACs and institutions can work together to administer at-school offers in ways that better enable diverse groups of students, by:

- considering eligibility factors beyond ATAR (which can be impacted by equity factors), and
- targeting specific equity groups for inclusion in at-school offer processes for particular programs.

Early release of school results

State curriculum authorities could play a key role in streamlining the at-school offer process by providing Unit 1 and 2 results directly to TACs as they become available. This would allow TACs to facilitate at-school offers more effectively by ensuring consistent access to verified academic data. While this occurs in some jurisdictions, the approach is not nationally consistent.

As an added benefit, this approach would eliminate the need for Year 12s to individually submit documentation to universities, reducing their administrative burden at a time when their energies are

better spent on completing Year 12. As we have observed in our push to streamline TAC application processes, the greater the administrative burden on the applicant, the more likely they are to disengage from the process.

University admissions processes

QTAC facilitates offers on behalf of tertiary institutions, with prescriptive guidance on eligibility on which to base its advice to, and assessment of, applicants. Therefore, it is not overly useful for QTAC to comment on university admissions processes that occur after a TAC offer is accepted by an applicant. However, we will share some select observations in response to the questions posed.

Informed course selection

QTAC provides a centralised, institution-agnostic source of advice and information on tertiary course options. Using our online resources, applicants can compare and contrast different tertiary course options and explore the career possibilities that are inherent to each course. They can also speak to QTAC's knowledgeable contact centre staff to receive personalised information on their tertiary options, tailored to their specific course and/or career interests. QTAC's one-stop-shop approach allows for consistency, transparency, equitability, and efficiency of enquiry.

Uniquely, the state-based TAC system allows applicants to preference multiple courses simultaneously, with students receiving an offer to the preference that aligns to their highest level of eligibility. This means that students can express interest in studying multiple course options that align with their interests, capabilities, and aspirations, widening their chance of receiving an offer to a course in their preferred field(s) of education.

Information on non-ATAR pathways

QTAC's online resources, and its contact centre team, provide advice and information on all manner of enabling, bridging, and pathways options for applicants who either do not have an ATAR, or wish to enter higher education through other means of eligibility. More than 40% of QTAC's typical applicant pool qualifies as non-Year 12, which means a significant proportion of applicants do not possess ATAR equivalency, and so provision of this information is a core focus for QTAC.

Equitable admissions practices

QTAC's Educational Access Scheme (EAS) is designed to support students who have faced challenges that have negatively impacted their most recent studies. This could include personal or financial hardship, health challenges, or disruptions to the academic environment, among other factors. Applicants accessing the EAS can receive adjustments to their selection rank, increasing their likelihood of an offer to their preferred course, and can be linked with offers of financial assistance and other supports at the institutional level. Centralising this process with the TACs provides a scalable solution for universities and an equitable playing field for applicants in seeking favourable admissions support.

Conclusion

QTAC is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the national conversation on university admissions. We look forward to engaging with the research findings and working with the Department of Education and other stakeholders on this important aspect of the tertiary education landscape.