

The UAC logo is a dark blue square with a green diagonal stripe running from the bottom-left corner to the top-right corner. The letters 'UAC' are written in white, bold, sans-serif font in the upper left portion of the square.

UAC



Productivity Inquiries – Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce

UAC Submission

June 2025

Introduction

The Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) Pty Ltd (UAC) was established in 1995 and is the largest tertiary admissions centre in Australia. Owned by universities in NSW and the ACT, our mission is to provide excellence in admissions services and promote equity of access to tertiary education. Central to that mission is a strong culture of servicing the needs of all our stakeholders, in particular our institutions and applicants.

UAC has a trusted and valuable position in the higher education sector. Applicants, in particular Year 12 students, turn to UAC for unbiased and authoritative information about university admissions and courses and for an easy interface with which to apply. Institutions rely upon UAC services to handle the bulk of the admissions process, allowing them to focus on their core capabilities of learning and teaching, research, and community engagement. Parents, schools, the media, and the public know UAC as their first point of reference for university admissions in NSW and the ACT.

As a not-for-profit working in the broad interests of the education sector, UAC is well-placed to provide objective and neutral advice to the Commonwealth Government and the Productivity Commission.

UAC is therefore pleased to provide the following response to the Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce Productivity Inquiry.

Support the workforce through a flexible post-secondary education and training sector

Credit transfer and recognition of prior learning

In your experience, how well does the credit transfer and recognition of prior learning system operate in Australia? Does it adequately support students to move between courses or have their work experience recognised as part of a qualification? Are there ways it could be improved?

UAC calculates the ATAR for over 55,000 NSW HSC students every year and processes over 190,000 applications to over 30 tertiary institutions from across Australia, including most domestic undergraduate applications in NSW and the ACT.

Students enter university through a variety of pathways as:

- Year 12 students
- International Year 12 students
- Non-Year 12 students
- Non-Year 12 international students
- Postgraduate students
- Current university students seeking to transfer to another course at the same university and
- Current university students seeking to transfer to a course at a different university.

For most Year 12 students credit recognition and recognition of prior learning are not applicable.

All other students apply with a variety of qualifications and experience. UAC assesses these against agreed criteria so that institutions can make offers of admission to eligible students. Work experience is included in this assessment, but it is up to each institution as to whether it will be considered in determining whether an offer will be made. Similarly, other forms of prior learning may be included in the admissions process at the discretion of each institution.

Credit is not currently included in the admissions process. Students apply for credit separately to the institution after enrolment in the course. Students are therefore required to make enrolment decisions without information on how much (if any) credit will be awarded. There is also currently no mechanism through which students can compare available credit between different institutions.

At the institution level credit assessment processes can be time-consuming and highly devolved, impacting staff across multiple teams and leading to inefficient and inconsistent application.

In this context there is significant room for improvement that would benefit students and institutions.

Existing platforms such as tertiary admissions centre admissions systems, UAC's Advance credit management system and future initiatives to consolidate sector-wide credit information and securely store and access learner credentials could be integrated to support lifelong learning and increase national productivity.

Answering some specific questions

- The clarity and ease of the application process for credit recognition or RPL:

Currently, the process for applying for credit recognition or recognition of prior learning (RPL) is managed independently by each institution, resulting in significant variation in both clarity and ease. This fragmentation creates confusion and inequity for applicants who are trying to navigate different requirements, documentation standards, timelines, and outcomes often without clear guidance.

Lack of simplicity and clarity also disproportionately affects those who most need clarity, such as students from non-traditional pathways, those returning to study, and those with work or life experience equivalent to formal qualifications. Applicants may be discouraged from applying for credit or RPL altogether due to the perceived complexity or opaqueness of the process.

Seamless lifelong learning for all relies upon efficient and informed navigation of all forms of post-school learning at all life stages. Current initiatives such as fee-free TAFE are valuable ways in which to increase the uptake of tertiary study, but even more value could be derived through greater clarity and accessibility of the pathways available beyond those programs.

- The transparency of the application process for credit recognition or RPL

Currently, the process for applying for credit recognition or recognition of prior learning (RPL) is managed independently by each institution, resulting in significant variation in transparency. As with the variation in clarity and ease, this fragmentation creates confusion and inequity for current and prospective students.

Lack of transparency – where it exists - undermines trust in the system for all students and may disproportionately affect students with lower social capital.

- The availability of up-front information about the likely provision of credit

Information is provided directly by each institution so there is significant variation across the sector, some of which is because of different policies between institutions. In addition, as credit is currently awarded after enrolment, students have little certainty about the amount of credit they will be awarded and are unable to compare available credit across institutions.

Students would benefit significantly from having certainty about available credit across institutions before they apply and then receiving that credit with their offer. With complete information, students

would be empowered to make enrolment decisions that reduce duplication and maximise efficiency for students, institutions and government.

- Whether enough is done to promote credit recognition and RPL options to students

While information is provided directly by each institution, data on the awareness of credit and RPL among current and prospective students from across the sector would be useful to understand whether enough is currently being done.

Improvements could be made at all stages of the student lifecycle. For secondary students, careers advisers could provide information not only about admission to initial tertiary study but also about subsequent movement between completed and partially completed studies. This is particularly important given the number of students who seek to transfer from or discontinue the course entered immediately after completion of Year 12.

Tertiary students could be provided with information from their institution to help them navigate transfers and options for further study upon completion of their current course. The additional information could give students the confidence to choose another course earlier if they feel they are on the wrong path, and/or prevent them from dropping out of study entirely.

Prospective students not currently studying could access information from government and tertiary admissions centres.

Ultimately, students making informed study decisions in their best interest will save the student, the institution, the government (and taxpayers) time and money.

- Whether it would be helpful to have a central method of tracking your credits and credentials.

In an increasingly mobile and skills-based education landscape, students are engaging with multiple institutions, short form credentialing, stackable learning and learning pathways throughout their lives. Yet there is no consistent, centralised method for individuals to track their credits, qualifications, and recognition of prior learning (RPL) across the tertiary sector.

This gap places an unnecessary burden on applicants, forcing them to manually collate documentation, re-explain their learning history, and often repeat study they've already completed. This is inefficient and inequitable.

A centralised platform for tracking academic credits and credentials that is secure, portable, and accessible to students would empower learners to take control of their educational journeys, reduce duplication.

Crucially, such a system must be designed with the applicant at the centre. It should prioritise ease of use, clear ownership of data by the learner, and compatibility across providers and jurisdictions. This system would support lifelong learning, workforce mobility, and the recognition of diverse learning pathways.

Information from this system should be designed to be interoperable with other digital platforms that streamline the credit application and assessment process such as UAC's Advance credit management system. Seamless data transfer between these systems would mean that students can apply for and institutions can award credit in a timely way using verified credentials.

- Are there ways the credit transfer and recognition of prior learning system could be improved?

- Greater consistency and timeliness in the information provided to students about whether their previous learning will be recognised in the admissions process and about their eligibility for credit would be a significant improvement. A desired end state for students would be:
 - having access to a repository of information in a consistent format about RPL and credit and the amount of credit they will be eligible to receive from each institution before they apply

- applying with certainty about the credit that will be awarded for each course they apply for
- receiving an offer to a course with confirmation of the credit awarded.
- Institutions would benefit from more streamlined credit recognition processes and the implementation of platforms that can automate established business rules regarding credit recognition. Integration of these tools with the application process provides additional benefits for students. UAC's Advance credit management system allows students to search all exposed precedents, and articulation agreements in place at their institution of choice to provide them with a list of all available credit based on their previous study and also provides tools for institutions to improve workflow and credit decision-making.
- The system would benefit from greater consistency in credit recognition for common tertiary pathways. For example, a completed Diploma is awarded 0.5 FTE of a Bachelor degree in the same field of education at all institutions.
- Increased awareness of credit and RPL among current and prospective students could be achieved through a joint national promotional campaign involving governments, institutions and tertiary admissions centres and other relevant stakeholders.
- For Australia to meet the ambitious targets for tertiary education attainment expressed in the Universities Accord in the most efficient and streamlined way:
 - current and prospective students will need to be armed with more consistent and transparent information about pathways to further study, how their previous study and prior learning can be used in the admissions process and how much credit they can be awarded before they apply
 - institutions will need to reduce the current administrative burden of credit recognition and improve the transparency and timeliness of credit information and recognition provided to students.
- The Universities Accord also places the needs of under-represented students at the heart of future tertiary reform. The absence of a unified, transparent system for tracking academic credit and recognition of prior learning (RPL) disproportionately impacts equity cohorts particularly First Nations Australians, students from rural, regional, and remote (RRR) areas, those from low socio-economic (low SES) backgrounds, and students with disability.

These students often face intersecting barriers in accessing and navigating tertiary education systems that were not designed with their needs in mind. For many, education is pursued in a non-linear way across institutions, through vocational and community pathways, or interrupted by personal, financial, or health-related circumstances. In such contexts, the ability to easily track, transfer, and have prior learning recognised is a matter of access and fairness.

For First Nations Australians, a lack of transparent and consistent credit recognition can compound existing structural disadvantages and reinforce mistrust in institutional processes. Many bring with them significant informal, cultural, or community-based learning that may not be easily recognised under fragmented institutional frameworks.

For RRR students, distance from major campuses means educational journeys are often shaped by what's available locally requiring articulation between TAFE and university, or across multiple institutions. Without a centralised system, they may need to re-provide documents or navigate different rules each time, leading to credit loss or duplication.

For low SES students, the administrative burden of tracking credits and negotiating RPL often without support or guidance can be an insurmountable hurdle. They may lack the time, resources, or institutional knowledge to navigate access to recognition of their learning.

And for students with disability, navigating inconsistent processes across institutions creates additional barriers to participation for students who already face a higher administrative load in disclosing and negotiating necessary learning adjustments.

UAC would like to thank the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to submit this response. We are happy for this submission to be credited to the Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) Pty Ltd (UAC).