

A Matter of Choice

Students Who Reject Offers of Scarce Places in Universities and TAFE Colleges

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During the 1991-92 tertiary admissions period, 65,000 applications for Queensland higher education places were processed by the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC). Of the 38,623 applicants who were successful in gaining an offer of enrolment, 6,482 rejected the offer and another 1,961 accepted the offer but failed to enrol.

In effect, one in every five offers of a higher education place in a Queensland university or college of technical and further education (TAFE) was rejected at a time when the nation is experiencing an escalating demand for higher education and the Federal Government is seeking to address its unprecedented youth unemployment dilemma through the provision of extra places in universities and TAFE colleges.

This paper explores the pattern of rejection across various fields and levels of study offered in Queensland higher education institutions. It also discusses research initiated by the Queensland Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority (TEPA) to determine the factors effecting the high rejection rate for associate diploma courses offered through Queensland TAFE colleges.

The shortfall between the number of higher education places and the number of people who qualify for entry to higher education has grown rapidly in Australia in recent years (Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC), 1992). Rising unemployment and scarce higher education places have placed pressure on the federal and state governments to provide more funding for higher

education. As Karmel points out:

Employment opportunities ... affect people's wish to enrol (in higher education). The current employment situation has unquestionably raised the demand for university places...The provision of places in higher education has to be considered in the context of the relationship between educational and employment opportunities for the young as they move from school to further education/training and employment. Structural change in Australian industry and the impact of technological change on job skills have reduced and will continue to reduce full-time job opportunities for the young. Participation in tertiary education will therefore continue to rise... This implies some small increase in the entry of school leavers to higher education (consistent with the nation's labor force needs for university graduates) but much more significantly it involves a doubling of education/training in TAFE...

(Karmel, 1992)

The Federal Government will be injecting \$70 million per year into the TAFE system Australia-wide over the next three years in order to expand vocational education and training opportunities for school-leavers and the broader community (Williams, 1992). At the same time, the Commonwealth Higher Education Council's report on planning for the 1993-95 triennium calls upon the federal government to fund an additional 4,000 undergraduate places at universities over the next two years, over and above the 5,645 additional places already allocated for 1993 and 1994 (Dargaville, 1992).

While the provision of more places in both the university and TAFE sectors will assist in addressing the problem of unmet demand for higher education, it is important that extra places created through those funds are accessible to all applicants. Unmet demand for higher education in Queensland and Victoria is far in excess of every other Australian state (AVCC, 1992) yet, in Queensland, as many as one in five offers of a place in higher education was effectively rejected during the 1992 tertiary admissions period (QTAC, 1992). If offers were rejected largely because of barriers to access,

implications for future course and program expansion and development arise.

REJECTION OF OFFERS IN QUEENSLAND

Data published by QTAC, which processes most applications for enrolment in Queensland higher education courses, show that of the 38,623 higher education places offered to successful applicants during the 1992 tertiary admissions period, 6,482 were formally refused and another 1,961 were accepted but had not been taken up as at March 31 (the closing date for new enrolments).

Who rejected an offer

The admissions data collected by QTAC show that, in spite of the relatively high youth unemployment rate, about one third of the 8,443 persons who effectively rejected an offer of enrolment were Queensland school-leavers and more than half were 21 years or under. Table 1 presents the summary statistics for each of these groups.

Table 1: Sub-groups Rejecting QTAC Offer 1992

21 Years or Less	Over 21 Years	Queensland School-leavers	Others	TOTAL
2614	360	1822	3971	44364
07				

What offers were rejected

Applicants may indicate up to six preferences from some 500 'courses' coded by QTAC. Table 2 indicates the number of persons in each category rejecting an offer to enrol and shows the applicant's ranking of the offered course in terms of his or her other preferences.

Table 2: Rejection of Preference, by Number

Preference Number

Rejected

123456 Qld School-leavers 21 Years or less 7604573983493582920 over 21
Yrs 12672630 others 21 Years or less 7133752562131481170 over 21
Yrs 2270687414296161143 ALL 375515251075860673555

Almost 50% of persons who rejected offers of enrolment in higher education during the 1992 tertiary admissions period rejected a place in a course listed as their highest preference, and almost 70% rejected an offer of enrolment in one of their two most preferred courses.

QTAC 'course codes' allow for applicants' course preferences to be categorised into institution-type (university/ TAFE) broad fields of study (eg. arts, science, law, business) and levels of award (degree/ diploma/ associate diploma). Table 3 summarises the offers rejected during the 1992 admissions period in terms of the type of institution offering the course, the field of study, and the award level. It also indicates the preference number for the course as designated by applicant rejecting the offer.

The largest numbers of rejections were in university degree courses in the arts, business, and science fields (some 36% of all rejections) and in the TAFE associate diploma courses in the business field (some 24% of all rejections). University degree courses in the medical and educational fields also received a sizeable proportion of the rejections.

The pattern of rejection by preference number is similar across all course types except one. The TAFE associate diploma courses in business maintain relatively high rejection numbers through to the lowest preference number. In fact, more than 50% of the offers rejected in these courses were listed as a third or lower preference by those persons rejecting the offers.

Most rejected offers were for university courses. Each year 20-25% of offers of a university place are not accepted, so the proportion of university places refused during the 1992 admissions period is not unusual. In comparison, the 2,684 rejected TAFE offers constitute one third of all offers of a TAFE higher education place processed by QTAC.

TABLE 3: Institution-type, Preference Number and Field and Level of Study Rejected

-if specific barriers such as distance, financial constraints or geographic isolation prevented them from accepting the offer of enrolment in these courses;

- if they rejected the offer to pursue alternative forms of education or training;

-if they sought/accepted immediate employment opportunities in preference to further study.

A copy of the survey questionnaire is provided in Attachment 1.

Respondents to the questionnaire will also be providing information regarding their intention to reapply for admission to higher education during the next tertiary admissions period. QTAC admissions data shows that around one in five people who reject offers of enrolment in higher education reapply for a place in the following tertiary admissions period (Cameron, McClelland and Pope, 1990).

It is anticipated that the outcomes of this study will provide valuable information for the planned expansion and development of TAFE courses over the next three years.

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