

ANNUAL REPORT

to 30 June 1997

This report covers the activities of the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre to 30 June 1997. Other publications of the Centre are: VTAC Guide - a Guide to University and TAFE Courses; VICTER -Victorian Tertiary Entrance Requirements; Tertiary Selection and the TER; Back to the Books

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Management Committee

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Foreword

● This report covers the activities of the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre for the period 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997.

The operations of the Centre have proceeded very smoothly during this period. In addition, there have been several key developments as part of a strategic plan to position VTAC for the immediate future. This plan encompassed all levels of VTAC's resources, services to institutions and schools, methods of application and publications.

The Australasian Year 12 results conversation table was used successfully by all admission centres during the 1996/7 cycle. This table, which facilitated for the first time nationally an agreed method of fairly and equitably comparing interstate performance, was developed under the auspices of an Implementation Committee, which I chair, of the MCEEYTA Taskforce on an Australian Tertiary Admissions System.

I would like to acknowledge the work of each state in this exercise and the support of a range of expertise, in particular that provided by Professor Tim Brown, Department of Mathematics and Statistics, The University of Melbourne.

The latter part of the period saw a great deal of planning and effort devoted to the inclusion of fee paying procedures for local applicants within the VTAC selection system. This was achieved with minimal disturbance to existing arrangements. Four universities – Deakin University, Monash University, RMIT University and The University of Melbourne will select fee paying local applicants through VTAC as a result of the introduction of these procedures.

In April, the Office of Training and Further Education released the report of their review of TAFE participation in VTAC. The report concluded, while making several recommendations, that the incorporation of TAFE in the VTAC process has delivered the key intentions behind this policy decision:

- TAFE institutes themselves testify to improved and more consistent selection processes, with some also commenting upon the higher quality of applicants for TAFE courses;
- Current and intending students and their teachers indicate that the TAFE profile, as a viable alternative to university, has been raised;
- TAFE courses have been promoted to the same audience as university courses through the VTAC Guide;
- For a significant subsegment of the VTAC cohort duplication of effort has been eliminated by a single application and selection process.

This is the first year that VTAC has produced an annual report bringing together statistical information made available to institutions and other agencies, and financial and other various reports which have previously been handled as committee documents.

The content and format has been based on interstate publications and has been approved by the VTAC Management Committee. VTAC looks forward to responses from institutions and other users for guidance in the production of future annual reports.

It is with pleasure that I present this report of the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre.



Professor Robert Pargetter
Chair, Management Committee

The mission of the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre is:

To provide for its members, institutes of TAFE and participating institutions a range of quality tertiary admission and related services at an international best practice standard.

To provide its clients, applicants for the tertiary courses offered by these institutions, with efficient, simple and equitable admission procedures together with accurate and accessible information about those courses.

Objectives and strategies

● For members, institutes of TAFE and participating institutions

Objective 1 — to devise selection policies for the joint selection system without derogation from the rights of each member, institute of TAFE or participating institution to determine for itself the principles for the selection of new students or the prescription of prerequisites for courses.

Objective 2 — to establish and administer comparable admission procedures for members, institutes of TAFE and participating institutions by providing a rational, centralised, equitable, efficient and effective framework and related processes for the admission of new students.

Objective 3 — to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information about developments in the administration of tertiary admissions to meet the changing needs and circumstances of its members, institutes of TAFE and participating institutions.

Objective 4 — to enhance services to members, institutes of TAFE and participating institutions by exploring opportunities in areas that complement VTAC's functions.

Objective 5 — to carry out such other functions as the Management Committee and Board of Trustees deem desirable to further the objectives of VTAC and the common interests of members and institutes of TAFE.

Strategy 1 — Collaborate with and advise its members, institutes of TAFE and participating institutions in revising selection policies and procedures as may be required.

Strategy 2 — Administer special tertiary admissions tests for the purpose of assisting in the selection of certain applicants.

Strategy 3 — Assist its members, institutes of TAFE and participating institutions in administering their procedures for the admission of new students by providing:

- training and support for selection personnel
- statistics and data files on admissions and for research purposes.

Strategy 4 — Develop computer systems and associated procedures and implement new technologies which support the admissions process.

Objectives and strategies

● For applicants

Objective 1 — To enhance and facilitate interest in tertiary education in Victoria by providing efficient, simple and equitable procedures to apply for places in courses together with accurate and accessible information about those courses.

Based on a preference system that facilitates multiple choice, the procedures provide an option for change of preference and place applicants in the course of highest preference for which they can be accepted.

Strategy 1 — Provide all prospective applicants with details of courses available in member and participating institutions and institutes of TAFE, and of the requirements and procedures for selection into these courses.

Strategy 2 — Disseminate impartial information about:

- tertiary education in Victoria to schools and school communities and other groups of potential tertiary students
- the TER and scaling process
- the existence of VTAC and the application process generally.

Strategy 3 — Co-operate with other bodies committed to the same objectives as VTAC.

Computing resources/imaging

- As part of the strategic plan 1997-1999, adopted by the Management Committee in November 1996, a report reviewing in the first instance the imaging system but broadened to examine the total computing configuration, was also accepted. The report was prepared by Praxa Limited, the consulting company responsible for the original imaging system.

As a result a new integrated system will be developed combining the applicant and imaging databases which currently exist as separate entities. The new database, to be built using Oracle tools, will involve transferring an upgraded and re-written imaging system, with eventual Internet access to the Alphas. Application system routines will be gradually transferred to the new database beginning in the latter part of 1997. A fully centralized on line offering arrangement with Internet access completes the plan.

Overall, the outcome will be a simple, more efficient, more reliable, less difficult to maintain configuration, which incorporates an imaging system re-written in fully supported software into an integrated main system on a contemporary RDB platform.

Information provision

- A range of activities was undertaken in this area in addition to those normally carried out, both to meet specific needs and to improve services to schools.

A TER and Selection booklet was written by the Chair, Professor Robert Pargetter and circulated to all Year 10, 11 and 12 students in Victoria. A video covering the same material was also sent to each school.

This combination of information delivery was decided following a series of focus group discussions with years 11 and 12 students and their advisors in several schools to determine what students, and in their view parents, would find most accessible in endeavouring to understand the complexities of TER calculations and the need for and mechanics of scaling.

What emerged from these discussions is that students wanted to be apprised of all the relevant information in a form that could be regularly accessed, hence the booklet. The video was targeted at parents and the wider school community.

The introduction of the booklet, which provides a brief overview of the TER and scaling process, was translated into nine community languages and circulated according to need.

The Honorable Philip Honeywood, Minister Tertiary Education and Training, launched this important initiative before an invited audience representing ethnic communities.

In order to supplement these productions the Chair and Professor Tim Brown, Chair of the TER and Scaling Committee and major contributor to the TER and Selection booklet, conducted 13 information sessions throughout metropolitan and regional Victoria, explaining the TER and scaling process to a range of audiences.

To improve VTAC's on-going interaction with schools, the purchase of a school developed software package, VTAC *Career Easy*, was negotiated with the aim of marketing it to all Victorian schools, with certain improvements to meet VTAC's long term goals, on a largely cost recovery basis.

The package contains both a teacher and a student module. The teacher module enables schools to track, analyze and record application data systematically and in a manner that facilitates proactive counselling of students. The student module facilitates planning of studies through database searches of prerequisites, trial applications and viewing of all VTAC publications from one source.

The package was introduced to schools in March and April via meetings with all the Career Teacher Associations and made available in June with three years (1998, 1999 and 2000) of prerequisite and course data. At the end of June over 250 schools had purchased the software.

Plans were also formulated to forward data to all schools electronically rather than hard copy, commencing in October 1997.

The year to 30 June 1997 saw the culmination of a major initiative which began in May 1996, with the publication of *Back to the Books* also launched by Minister Honeywood. This initiative was directed at satisfying the needs of non school leaver applicants who do not have the advice and support network available to Year 12 students.

Back to the Books was widely applauded and supported by an extensive media campaign which was aimed to heighten awareness of VTAC and the existence of an application process. A series of evening information sessions, directed at the issues facing applicants returning to study was also held throughout the state.

These sessions (90 in total) were organized and conducted by members of the Tertiary Information Service (TIS). This service is a cooperative venture between Victorian universities, institutes of TAFE and other government funded related agencies. It has been active in the provision of tertiary education information for over 20 years.

Before its involvement in these sessions its activities were confined to Year 12 students. VTAC is extremely grateful to members of TIS and their institutions for incorporating these sessions in their mission.

Fee paying procedures for local applicants

- In the latter half of the year considerable time was devoted to developing fee paying procedures for local applicants following agreement amongst the universities that these applications should be processed through VTAC.

A systematic approach to the inclusion of fee paying procedures within the VTAC system was achieved with minimal disturbance to existing arrangements. Schools and Career Teacher Associations were involved in the decision making process. The new procedures will be promulgated in the 1998 *Guide to University and TAFE Courses* and discussed at annual briefing sessions for Careers Teachers.

They involve applicants being able to express preferences for fee based and government subsidized courses in one integrated preference order, increased to 12 choices but with applicants being able to express no more than 8 of either type.

Applicants will now be able to receive up to two offers in any round, their highest preference fee based and government subsidized offers and be eligible for higher preference offers of either type than the ones received in later rounds, irrespective of whether the offers are accepted, rejected or allowed to lapse.

Early release of VCE and TER data

● Prior to the finalization of fee paying procedures the Management Committee discussed the evolution and flexibility of the VTAC system in an increasingly competitive environment. How to maintain a cooperative system, based on an established code of practice, which benefitted all users while still satisfying additional institutional requests; for example, early details about their applicants to accelerate scholarship decisions; became the focus for decision making.

Emanating from this discussion a revised code of practice was developed which allowed institutions, under very strict guidelines, early access to their applicants for the purpose of scholarship determination. Before the advent of this revision institutions were not apprised of their Year 12 applicants' details until the change of preference had concluded.

The guidelines state that early access to applicant data cannot be used:

- to promote, market or advertise courses
- to make contact with applicants in any way that would interfere with or influence their change of preference except that it is accepted that an offer of a scholarship may influence change of preference
- to make offers of places outside of the agreed offer rounds or indicate the intention to make an offer
- to introduce a selection criterion or procedure not promulgated in the Guide
- to exclude from consideration an applicant by comparing preference levels in the file to eventual levels after change of preference.

1996 Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT) Report

Test Usage

The testing program was consolidated in 1996 with only two STAT tests, STAT Multiple Choice and STAT Written English being used by Tertiary Admissions Centres across Australia.

STAT Multiple Choice was the most widely used test series. It comprised 50% percent verbal, 50% quantitative and was used by 269 courses. STAT Written English comprises of a written English essay and was used by 10 courses.

Since VTAC was willing (and able) to organise special sittings of any STAT, a large number of overseas and Tasmanian applicants to any Australian Tertiary Institutions, registered to do their STAT test through VTAC.

The number of candidates who registered to sit the Special Tertiary Admissions Test was 200 fewer than in 1994/95.

Total Number of candidates registered		2180
• Multiple Choice only		1932
• Written English only		18
• both Multiple Choice and Written English		230
Number of tests booked		2410
Number of tests sat		2007
Number of tests not sat (absentee)		403
Number of registrations withdrawn		96
Number of special sittings arranged	Registrations	Tests
• Overseas	21	22
• Interstate	5	8
• VTAC	67	77
• Other	4	4
• Incomplete	11	12
Total	108	123

Test	1995			1996		
	Registrations	Tests sat	Absent	Registrations	Tests sat	Absentees
STAT A	16	16	0	0	0	0
STAT B	12	12	0	0	0	0
STAT C	2333	2155	178	0	0	0
STAT D	3	2	1	0	0	0
STAT E	157	129	28	0	0	0
STAT F	1	1	0	0	0	0
STAT G	1	1	0	0	0	0
TISC E	11	11	0	0	0	0
	2534	2327	207	0	0	0
STAT Multiple Choice	0	0	0	2162	1832	330
STAT Written English	0	0	0	248	175	73
TOTAL	2534	2327	207(8.2%)	2410	2007	403(16.7%)

Registration

Registration was incorporated in the VTAC Application Form included in the VTAC Guides, and was only provided individually to those candidates who were currently enrolled in VCE studies. The STAT Sample Collection of Questions (SCQ) was available over the counter at VTAC, and unless VTAC was informed that a SCQ had already been obtained was sent out to all successful STAT registrants with their registration package. Overall, in excess of 3500 STAT Sample Collection of Questions were distributed.

Separate closing dates applied for each of the general testing sessions. With the incorporation of STAT Registration within the VTAC Application process a longer lead time was allowed for processing of forms which resulted in earlier closing dates. It was noted that there were many requests for registration following the latest STAT closing date of 30 October. These requests could not be met.

Testing

General testing sessions were held at two metropolitan venues (La Trobe University, Bundoora and Monash University, Clayton), and at La Trobe University, Bendigo, on 9 November and 23 November. Applicants to courses involved in the early offer round were instructed to register for the first testing session on 9 November to ensure timely availability of results to selection authorities for these courses. Testing sessions were held at La Trobe University, Albury-Wodonga and Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Mildura on 9 November to accommodate the demand from rural areas for local testing venues.

The number of actual sittings at each of the venues were as follows:

Institution	Date	Morning	Afternoon
La Trobe University, Bundoora	9 November	236	270
	23 November	64	110
Monash University, Clayton	9 November	377	362
	23 November	149	178
La Trobe University, Bendigo	9 November	35	35
	23 November	13	16
La Trobe University, Albury-Wodonga	9 November	26	18
Sunraysia TAFE, Mildura	9 November	5	4

Special arrangements were made for candidates unable to attend any of the general testing sessions. Applicants sitting the test(s) overseas paid an additional fee of \$40.00 to cover courier, fax and associated costs. In addition to tests held overseas or interstate, tests were conducted at VTAC for candidates who were ill, or unable to attend on a Saturday for religious reasons.

Reciprocal arrangements continued between the Admission Centres of other states and VTAC, enabling candidates in any state to sit tests for an interstate application. This reciprocity resulted in an increase in the number of special sittings, since VTAC alone was willing to organise them.

Comments

- The inclusion of the STAT Registration within the VTAC Application Form was on the whole an improvement, although a number of candidates completed the registration section simply because it was there. This caused considerable additional work in the way of ascertaining the actual requirements of the candidates and following up payment which was often not made with the submission of the application form, causing confusion as to whether or not to proceed with the registration.

The testing program ran smoothly in 1996 despite a few areas of concern, the main one being payment.

Audit scope

● The accompanying financial statements of the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre for the year ended 30 June 1997, comprising a balance sheet, revenue and expense statement and notes* to the financial statements, have been audited. The members of the Centre are responsible for the preparation and presentation of these financial statements and the information they contain. An independent audit of the financial statements has been carried out in order to express an opinion on them as required by the *Audit ACT* 1994.

The audit has been conducted in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards to provide reasonable assurance as to whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement. The audit procedures included an examination, on a test basis, of evidence supporting the amounts and other disclosures in the financial statements and the evaluation of accounting policies and significant accounting estimates. These procedures have been undertaken to form an opinion as to whether, in all material respects, the financial statements are presented fairly in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and other mandatory professional reporting requirements, so as to present a view which is consistent with my understanding of the financial position of the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre and the results of its operations and its cash flows.

The auditor opinion expressed on the financial statements has been formed on the above basis.

Audit opinion

● In my opinion, the financial statements present fairly the financial position of the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre as at 30 June 1997 and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year ended on that date in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and other mandatory professional requirements.



C. A. Baragwanath
Auditor-General

*notes have not been included in this report

Balance Sheet as at 30 June 1997

	1997	1996
	\$	\$
Equity: retained earnings	842,308	786,584
Total Equity	842,308	786,584
Current Liabilities:		
Sundry creditors and accruals	253,338	66,016
Audit fee	6,000	12,000
Provision for recreation leave	66,021	74,647
Receipts in advance	35,547	25,380
Total Current Liabilities	360,906	178,043
Non-current Liabilities:		
Provision for long service leave	87,917	91,380
Total Non-current Liabilities	87,917	91,380
Total Equity and Liabilities	1,291,131	1,056,007
Current Assets:		
Cash at bank and on-hand	8,927	(146,084)
Sundry debtors	45,115	—
Investments	483,346	508,354
Payments in advance	35,341	23,041
Total Current Assets	572,729	385,311
Non-Current Assets:		
Furniture and equipment	284,100	458,342
Motor vehicles	64,705	60,947
Leasehold improvements	42,664	63,574
Imaging system equipment	107,296	40,520
System software development and installation costs	219,637	47,313
Total Non-current Assets	718,402	670,696
Total Assets	1,291,131	1,056,007

Revenue and Expense Statement for the Year Ended 30 June 1997

	1997	1996
	\$	\$
Operating revenue:		
Contributions	1,535,473	2,349,333
Processing fees	1,050,088	466,799
Bank income	38,791	44,073
Book bounty and Copyright	10,852	—
Sale of fixed asset	37,755	—
IVR Telstra	389,593	283,518
Career Easy income	58,250	—
TIS membership	8,120	6,400
Sundries	1,696	9,702
TOTAL Operating Revenue	3,130,618	3,159,825
Less operating expenses:		
Salaries and related costs	1,169,067	1,152,904
Staff fares and allowances	30,544	32,028
Office occupancy expenses	172,707	165,961
Telephone, postal and delivery costs	321,846	227,191
Office equipment expenses	121,701	211,106
Office stationery and requisites	132,433	117,483
Printing and reproduction	347,156	233,990
Fees and charges	61,539	22,118
Public relations	5,988	2,979
Special programs	341,840	340,206
ACTAC conference	—	9,039
Board of Studies	—	7,750
Consultancy	22,400	10,000
Written down value of fixed asset sold	26,592	—
Depreciation non-current assets	295,807	286,587
Software development costs written off	37,363	40,846
Provision for recreation leave	(8,626)	1,905
Provision for long service leave	(3,463)	18,964
TOTAL Operating Expenses	3,074,894	2,881,057
Operating surplus (deficit) for the Year	55,724	278,768
Retained surplus/(accumulated deficit) at the beginning of the Year	786,584	507,816
Retained surplus/(accumulated deficit) at the end of the Year	842,308	786,584