

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## *Aptitude testing in university admissions*

An Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) report released this week by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations calls for the wider use of aptitude testing to ensure that senior secondary students with the capacity to do well at university are able to gain admission.

Report co-author, ACER Higher Education Research Director, Associate Professor Hamish Coates said there is a need to develop new approaches to university selection that are simple and transparent for prospective students, and that maintain practical benefits for institutions.

“Australia is actively seeking to boost participation in higher education with new funding and regulatory arrangements but nothing will change unless we seriously address admissions,” said Coates. “This report provides strong evidence that information from aptitude testing can help institutions manage the rush of additional applications.”

The report concluded that aptitude testing has the potential to increase diversity within the university population, especially in terms of gender and socioeconomic status. Importantly, aptitude test scores were shown to have significantly lower correlations with socioeconomic backgrounds than Year 12 academic results.

The ACER report was based on the results of a pilot program using uniTEST – an aptitude test that assesses reasoning and thinking across the two broad domains of mathematics and science, and humanities and social sciences. The test was designed to complement existing selection criteria such as the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

The report concludes that success at university is better predicted by uniTEST than by Year 12 results, but that the two in combination provide a more powerful means of predicting first-year performance than either measure on its own.

The study found that uniTEST identified students who would not otherwise have been offered a university place, and that these students performed on a par with students who entered university through other means, most commonly through Year 12 scores.

“Many Year 12 students who possess the ability to succeed at university do not achieve an ATAR that is high enough to gain entry,” said Coates. “uniTEST has the potential to identify ‘latent talent’ and facilitate the inclusion of capable individuals in the system.”

The full report is available from:

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/Pages/sattapilotprogram.aspx>

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