

CHAPTER 5 - ADMISSION AND ASSESSMENT A POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE ADMISSIONS MODEL

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 The methods used for deciding whether or not to admit Queensland school-leavers (and others) without TERs to tertiary courses were observed and considered along with the investigation of accessible evidence reported in Chapter 4.

5.1.2 This Chapter reports on those observations. It emphasises processes used and actions taken by people making decisions about evidence and applicants – typically administrative or academic staff, sometimes both. It also considers the roles of their organisations – typically tertiary institutions, parts of tertiary institutions, or QTAC.

5.1.3 This approach contrasts with that in Chapter 4, which is composed from the perspective of the applicant making an alternative admissions submission.

5.1.4 Chapter 5 considers:

- comparative, codified characteristics of admission and selection;
- how current observed Queensland alternative processes reflect these;
- how characteristics of the type of provision envisaged in this project might embody or move beyond current processes;
- what form - as a model - a more comprehensive alternative process might take.

5.1.5 The discussion of practicable future action is conducted in Chapter 6.

5.2 ASSESSMENT AND ADMISSION

5.2.1 As the project developed, the team observed that QTAC processes tended to cast a long shadow across the tertiary entry contexts investigated. In different ways, almost all alternative methods for granting entry to courses that were examined, and the people operating them:

- were influenced to some degree, sometimes heavily, by the arrangements for ranking school-leavers, using TERs, and others, using TERs (OE);
- made judgments about selecting applicants for available course places with some degree of reference to where they might be placed in relation to TER, or to the most familiar QTAC TER(OE) ranking scales;

- brought many of their activities into juxtaposition with the general processes used by QTAC.
- 5.2.2 The principal observed exception was the process used for fine discrimination, effectively within one TER band, employed by the QUT (Science) Dean's Scholars program.
- 5.2.3 As was the case on more than one occasion during the project, the observations of alternative admissions processes being progressively accumulated by the team created the need to examine assumptions underlying such procedures and their relevance to questions to which the project itself was directed.
- 5.2.4 During field-work, the researchers examined several "alternative" selection schemes and saw that sometimes a distinction was made between the assessment of individuals in cohorts versus the admission of individuals seen alone – sometimes elements of the two approaches were merged.
- 5.2.5 This distinction impacted on subsequent considerations about the design of a selection model. It increasingly influenced the analytical thinking of the team, and for that reason is presented here, in advance of some of the more detailed observations on the alternative processes examined.
- 5.2.6 The intended use to be made of a selection method or instrument and its setting are fundamental factors in design. At issue is whether the instrument is intended:
- to **assess** an applicant's merit such that the person can be placed in a hierarchical order of applicants as a basis for making essentially mechanical selection decisions - the assessment model, or
 - to **admit** an applicant to a course with little or no consideration of the wider applicant pool - the admission model.

Assessment Model

- 5.2.7 In an assessment model as used within the traditional contexts of tertiary admission centres, decision-making and selection processes are generally divided into two phases:
- Decisions about an applicant's eligibility to undertake a course – do they satisfy course specific entry requirements such as subject pre-requisites, age requirements, and so on?
 - Decisions about an applicant's level of eligibility to be selected to be offered a tertiary place – do they merit being allocated a place above the others available when considered against the ranks of all eligible applicants?

- 5.2.8 There are usually conventions for identifying and using evidence of eligibility – eg for school-leavers, almost exclusively school-based subject rankings and TERs.
- 5.2.9 In the assessment model, applicants are not selected on the basis of their qualifications per se, but on a dynamic relationship between their qualifications and, at the point in time of the selection decision, the larger pool of the then applicants' qualifications.
- 5.2.10 An individual applicant's qualifications are assessed separately and allocated a numerical rank in such a way that they can be ordered to form a qualification profile and subsequently compared to the qualification profiles of all other applicants.
- 5.2.11 The issue of the assessment of qualifications is, of necessity, separated from the selection process (eligibility versus allocateability) as a fundamental characteristic of a profile-based process of tertiary selection.
- 5.2.12 Additional external forces may be enacted, at the time of selection, such as
- changing institutional decisions about quotas of places available, and
 - imposition of a cut-off score that directly affects eligibility level - whether an applicant is finally selected, even though a person has been assessed as eligible in other respects, especially in comparative historical selection terms.

Admissions Model

- 5.2.13 In contrast to the predominant use of the assessment-based model by QTAC, the alternative admissions schemes examined as part of this project were predominantly admissions models that have specific merits within the strict parameters and contexts of their use.
- 5.2.14 However, any notion that the admissions approach is to determine an applicant's selection with little or no consideration of the wider applicant pool needs to be qualified by observations of how determining officers, administrative and academic, went about making admissions decisions.
- 5.2.15 This project found that, even within the contexts of "alternative" admissions schemes, the assessment model, typified by that developed and used by QTAC, was a constantly influential factor, both consciously and unconsciously, in decision making by determining officers, both in tertiary institutions and in QTAC.
- 5.2.16 This was so even within models that proclaimed themselves holistic.

- 5.2.17 Given some of the issues considered later in this Chapter concerning development of a more general alternative admissions process, and people to operate it, as well as features of the gradual public acceptance of qualitative judgement set out in Chapter 3, the project does not wish to suggest that such mostly implicit benchmarking is inappropriate. Rather, processes need to become more self-conscious and deliberate about any such use that seems necessary.
- 5.2.18 Within the broader context of a State tertiary admissions centre with its large number of institutional courses and applicant preferences, the use of holistic assessment in the general admissions process, even if it were desirable, is logistically too complex to be effective and too expensive to conduct.
- 5.2.19 Since many of the key typifying elements of an assessment model have been considered in the preceding text, the salient typifying features of the observed admissions model can now be set against those with less expansive explanation. This is done in Table 5.1.
- 5.2.20 The contents of the table have been developed by observation, discussion with those conducting alternative admissions processes, and informed reflection.

Table 5.1: Comparison of Typifying Elements of Observed Assessment and Admission Approaches to Selection for Tertiary Courses

<u>Assessment Model</u>	<u>Admission Model</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based in admissions centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly institutionally based – but evolving to include admissions centres
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on applicant pool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on individual applicant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses specific (or equivalent), limited range of evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses non-congruent elements from broad range of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impersonal, quantitative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative, personally affected
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily formula-based assessment of evidence leading to an applicant profile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic judgements about evidence and applicants' characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives little emphasis to relevance of general previous study performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives emphasis to relevance of general previous study performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little account taken of the “motivation” of applicant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater account taken of the “motivation” of applicant

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant selection is based on a common definition of “merit” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admission decision made using “paradigm” based decision making often linked with “expert” judgement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invariably reliant on satisfying prerequisite rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequently reliant on satisfying prerequisite rules
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More criteria dependent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less criteria dependent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the “point in time” offer round 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing offers made through time as single instances
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tends to be “rule” driven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tends to be “process” driven
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross course and institution focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific course and institution focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions about selection of the individual deferred pending assessment of all other applicants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing of decision making independent of times of assessment of other applicants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High, measured comparability of assessment across applicants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less measured comparability of assessment across applicants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine-grained discrimination between applicants on the basis of first, second, third order ranks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad based decision making leading to a positive, negative, or occasionally conditional decision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to handle large numbers of applicants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to relatively small numbers of applicants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speedy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource intensive, expensive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to track grounds for decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to track grounds for decisions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible regardless of applicant geography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility affected by location of applicant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lends itself to automation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually requires some personal interaction and/or consideration

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally perceived as being accountable and transparent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally perceived as being less accountable and transparent
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5.2.21 For developing a more general, alternative tertiary admission model, four factors need to be addressed:

- the character of the model;
- the dynamics of decision making within its context;
- the extent to which a range of courses and fields of study can be encompassed by each decision on an applicant and associated set of operators working under the model; and
- the management of decision making and related personnel to ensure contemporary and longitudinal consistency.

5.2.22 The comparisons between the assessment and the admissions models point particularly to a range of elements that addresses mainly the first of those factors.

5.2.23 The other factors will be addressed in later parts of this Chapter and in the next.

5.3 CONSIDERATION OF EVIDENCE IN FIVE CURRENT, SPECIFIC, QUEENSLAND ADMISSION SCHEMES

5.3.1 Much of the character of the five schemes observed in practical operation has been reported in Chapter 4 in association with considerations of evidence presented and drawn upon, and related processes.

5.3.2 Increasingly, it was observed that “evidence” means not only the matter put forward formally by applicants, typically comprising a sub-set of the elements listed in Classes A to D in Table 4.2, but also at least two types of second-order matter touched on in Class E evidence listed in the table:

- the manner in which applicants assemble, present, and argue a case from their evidence; and
- whatever an applicant projects personally, eg during an interview or telephone conversation, to create a general or specific impression of suitability with a person making a selection judgment.

- 5.3.3 Features of processes for considering evidence presented by applicants, and the approach taken by the people who make the judgements on the evidence, were the main matters observed and considered.
- 5.3.4 This method necessarily requires some commentary by the project about those features of programs observed – in the sense of seeing them to some extent as natural experiments. That commentary is made in relation to the purpose of this project and its development, and what can be learnt from the programs observed. No comment is made on the schemes themselves, except to admire them.
- 5.3.5 The project team is deeply aware of the considerable efforts made by people making selection judgements honestly to ensure equity, and progressively to review and improve their procedures and approaches for making judgements. The commitment of those people to the worth of the programs they conduct is commendable. Providing deliberately for this sort of selector development is a core part of the model later considered.

Schemes Dealing with Individual Disadvantage

- 5.3.6 The comments here refer mainly to the QSTEP¹ program. The scheme deals with relatively small numbers seeking admission to sometimes quite small and “prestige” cohorts usually being admitted through conventional routes.
- 5.3.7 Although in that circumstance there are some implicit or explicit expectations about TER levels, the core judgment factor almost always referred to was “gut feel”. Assessor confidence in gut feel – seen as a form of holistic judgment - has typically been built up over time and with experience.
- 5.3.8 In courses where selectors believe there is a strong relationship between success and TER, more weight is given to school achievement. Where there is lower perceived or demonstrated relationship, weight is given to secondary school advice. But in the end the shared judgement of the experienced academic and administrative assessors is what counts.
- 5.3.9 Selectors’ typical comments are:
- “never been given strict guidelines – just use own judgement”
 - “the committee will agree on whether a particular applicant is suited to the course from the first time they see their application ... 20-30% (of cases) where they might be uncertain”

¹ Queensland University of Technology.

- “(we) try to follow a more holistic process”
 - “judge each application on its merits, rather than compare two applicants”
- 5.3.10 The use of binary, single-instance decisions is a method for admitting people to groups common to many formal decision-making situations outside admissions, eg selection for appointment to positions. However, there is an interesting level of insecurity shown by some assessors about their capacity to justify the process when applied to admissions – even though some do recognise that the process gives them more grounds on which to select candidates than relying solely on TERs.
- 5.3.11 One assessor sums up the feeling – “It would be hard to justify to parents why their children didn’t get in using these methods.”
- 5.3.12 It would be possible or even reasonable to expect this concern to extend to comparability of marginal choices using TERs on one hand, and the 400-odd QTAC schedules used for mature admissions on the other. Yet, this does not seem to occur – as observed in Chapter 3.
- 5.3.13 Given the observations reported in Chapter 3 about the public acceptance of the range of different tertiary admissions routes, it is surmised that operational staff of tertiary institutions welcome the comfort of their usually more remote association with central admissions decision making.
- 5.3.14 For the specific, local, alternative admissions work they are doing, they might well benefit from having more support for their activities and self assurance about them. As in many qualitative areas, personal confidence about performance seems to depend on:
- being professionally equipped or developed to do the work;
 - understanding what the procedures are and the principles on which they are based; and
 - being able to articulate the general procedures and their application in a particular case.
- 5.3.15 These factors would be at least as important to conducting a general alternative admissions system based on qualitative judgments.

University Mainstream Admissions Using Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence

- 5.3.16 The Bond University admissions scheme, Chapter 4, has almost all the attributes of an alternative admissions scheme for school-leavers postulated later; yet it is

the University's mainstream undergraduate admissions machine, addressing the fields of law, business, and arts.

- 5.3.17 It has been able not only to establish an internal and external array of operating and assessing officers experienced over years in dealing with a high volume of applicants, but also to bring into being a set of *de facto* assessors delivering professional judgments into their admissions system. These are the principals and staffs of schools providing applicants to the University, and the University's regional admissions managers.
- 5.3.18 The decisive admissions judgments were fundamentally made by experienced and moderately senior professional general staff, with some referral to academic staff.
- 5.3.19 The judgmental process for selection relies on:
- data with a quantitative appearance, like school-based subject grades and performance ranks, about the appropriate levels for which assessors appear to have established enduring opinions affecting selection;
 - schools' (employers') normative placement of applicants in various academic and personal-qualities dimensions; and
 - otherwise holistic appraisals made by the University's assessors, honed by dealing with a relatively high volume of applications.
- 5.3.20 In the last respect, the working capital of confident judgment developed resembles that found, for example, in QTAC special consideration work, and QUT Science Dean's Scholar selectors.
- 5.3.21 The graduated information seeking and application process seems also to provide a formative opportunity for applicants - through a type of shaping, counselling, and aspiration-raising experience. For example, as reported to the project team, the broad and structured coverage sought in the application form, the need to write on tertiary-readiness themes, and the opportunity to talk to admissions staff and advisers, helps applicants in making personal decisions about their own fitness for Bond.

A Regional Special Admissions Scheme Using Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence

- 5.3.22 Griffith University's Logan Campus special admissions scheme, Chapter 4, is a single administrative operation using the same assessors to select for a notional quota of places in a range of about seven courses spanning arts, teaching, human resources, financial planning, food technology, and nursing.

- 5.3.23 The admissions judgments are made by individual administrative staff from a group of two, with recourse to one another and a senior manager.
- 5.3.24 The University supported the project team in undertaking analysis of the applications submitted by individuals, and retrospective case by case discussion with assessors of their procedures and judgments, based on case records and notes.
- 5.3.25 This detailed and time-consuming approach was strengthened by a number of group meetings of the project team with the assessors, where joint reflective discussion of the processing of applications occurred.
- 5.3.26 These activities allowed enquiries into a good deal of case-specific behaviour by assessors, leading to quite detailed observations relevant to developing a more general model. These are set out in the following paragraphs.
- 5.3.27 Quite a wide range of evidence was presented by applicants – Table 4.4 - including material brought forward with accompanying explanation during the useful interview stage of the application process.
- 5.3.28 In the 83 applications surveyed, few emphasised Senior grades in the written appraisal they prepared in their own behalf, even when the results were good. Applicants appear to consider that the presentation of alternative evidence precludes consideration of traditional school qualifications.
- 5.3.29 Assessors seemed to have a tendency to focus on a few main types of evidence. This was more noticeable in the case of applicants still in Year 12, when certain levels of subject grade (sound or above) appeared to be required to move selectors to grant admission.
- 5.3.30 This “requirement” at times seemed to override the presentation of apparently useful, tertiary-relevant experience – although rather more ambiguously for “mature” applicants.
- 5.3.31 Other types of evidence on which assessors tended to rely, as observed in the 83 cases where the judgmental process was discussed retrospectively with assessors, were these – grouped in roughly descending order of importance reflecting reports by the assessors individually:
- **motivation** – eg indicated by attendance at information sessions and interview, preparedness of personal case;
 - **commitment to study** – references, informed choice, prior study, articulated direction and field;

- **knowledge about course chosen** – content and career knowledge, related to personal interests, attendance at information evenings, work experience;
- **self presentation at interview** – “bright and articulate”;
- **substantial work experience** – mainly good references about work requiring initiative;
- **achievement of skills by non-academic means** – charity work, sporting achievements;
- **background of applicant** – “disadvantaged” background (socio-economically) needs to be compensated for in other factors.

5.3.32 As with some other processes observed, TERs and QTAC special admission schedules seemed to figure implicitly in the frame of reference of assessors. The project team formed the view, with some support from assessors, that rank-type notations on case documents indicated fairly common reliance on making judgments about the standing of applicants against knowledge of QTAC schedule requirements, ie engaging in a type of assessment using the schedules as scales or benchmarks, rather than using a holistic admissions process.

5.3.33 Another factor that interested the project team is the level of conditional admissions granted among the 83 cases examined – 45% for school-leaver applicants, and 35% for those over 19 years of age. This figure seems high for a designated early admissions scheme, and again implicitly raised issues of selector uncertainty of different sorts, eg about the defensibility of holistic binary judgement; or about how many places in a course should be filled prior to the scheduled end-of-year offer rounds from applicants with TERs or TERs(OE).

5.3.34 The value of these observations to this project will be seen in later discussion about an alternative admissions model and the calibration of assessors’ holistic judgment capabilities, and the need to have explicit admissions objectives.

Faculty-Based Program Selecting from High-Achieving School-Leavers

5.3.35 During selection of applicants to be offered places in the QUT Faculty of Science Dean’s Scholars Program, the judgements made are directed at finding people who will probably make good research scientists, and who will find the accelerated and enriched program offered by QUT to be personally suitable. A collateral objective is to provide formative assistance to applicants to develop a view about their personal “fit” with the course program, and to make appropriate choices of study and research interests.

- 5.3.36 The assessors are experienced members and researchers of the academic staff of the Faculty – at one level the Dean and Deputy-Dean, who also maintain strong policy and management support for the program, and at another level members of the main discipline areas in the Faculty.
- 5.3.37 Of the 97 initial Year 12 applicants, 46 lodged comprehensive personal applications and triggered the supply of references, leading to 17 offers eventually being made. The 46 entering the selection process lay within the TER 1, 2 and 3 bands, respectively being 60%, 30% and 10% of the group.
- 5.3.38 The process follows these steps:
- step 1 - all comprehensive applications are read, to form a basis for interview interaction;
 - step 2 - all those applicants are invited to attend for initial interview at the Faculty office, or undertake a telephone interview;
 - step 3 - those considered in the running for an offer are then invited to interview with staff in their discipline of interest.
- 5.3.39 In step 1, experience has led the Faculty assessors to defer forming closing notions on individual candidates, since they have found the effects of the interview at step 2 are the really determining factor in deciding on acceptance.
- 5.3.40 The exception to this concerns the TER obtained. A level lower than TER 1 would almost certainly lead to exclusion from the list, unless other written and personal evidence is strongly persuasive. The step-2 interview can be confirming, but can also produce new, decisive judgements to include or exclude applicants.
- 5.3.41 In step 2, the Faculty assessors informally and individually tend to use a three-level ranking to help them relate students within the overall field being considered. However, they move to the use of admissions-type binary judgement as the interviews proceed, rather than retaining a ranking-type assessment approach.
- 5.3.42 There is no quota for selection. Each assessor has benchmark students known from some years' experience in applicant and subsequent student performance. Some of those are known to all assessors, and serve as shared references during discussion of particular current candidates. Although the assessors indicate that it would be possible to make no offers, there appears to be confidence that, based on the history of the program, roughly the same number of acceptable candidates will emerge each year.

- 5.3.43 To provide one basis for later discussion with the Faculty assessors, two members of the project team and two experienced QTAC assessors individually ranked each of the 46 written applications to one of three levels, and used combined unweighted rankings to choose the top 17. While recognizing that the groups making the judgements were unconnected and of different composition, the outcomes were compared simply with the outcomes of the interviews conducted in the Faculty.
- 5.3.44 All 17 chosen by the Faculty were at TER 1: 3 chosen by the project team were at TER 2. The same nine of the 17 were chosen by each group. The remaining eight chosen by the Faculty were spread over the full range of choice by the project team.
- 5.3.45 The basis for choice was retrospectively discussed with Faculty-level assessors – generally, and through discussion of influential factors in cases highlighted by the comparative process just referred to.
- 5.3.46 The assessors had clearly reflected deeply on the qualitative character of their work, and were able to articulate clearly the factors and related evidence that they found influential.
- 5.3.47 One factor looked for throughout was ways of presenting and handling ideas, and taking novel perspectives, that convinced the assessors the applicant had the intellectual approach of a potential researcher. This was sometimes evident in insightful and creatively expressed short letters of application. On other occasions, despite somewhat pedestrian presentation of usually impressive arrays of academic and extra-mural achievements, performance in interviews could produce similarly convincing evidence.
- 5.3.48 The interview was seen by assessors as being a source of additional personal evidence, and a means of balancing written matter with up-front performance. Assessors described the interview as an occasion on which candidates had the chance to show themselves as exciting intellectually. They found many candidates to be “delightful people.” A firmly relied upon notion seemed to be that experienced researchers are able to recognise during interview, signs of the intellectual and personal qualities of a potential researcher.
- 5.3.49 When assessors spoke of the more tangible factors they responded to positively, they mentioned evidence pointing to:
- independent learning, and intellect or field-based activity;
 - creativity, imagination and innovation - in any field;

- particular intellectual achievements or experiences – relevant to research or chosen field – eg national science competitions;
- wide ranging enquiry and interests – eg in expressive arts;
- intrinsic pleasure derived from intellectual or scientific activity;
- capacity to articulate reasons or opinions concerning aspirations;
- ability to see and explain “connections”;
- determination, maturity, team work, suitability for accelerated academic program.

5.3.50 Referees’ reports are not highly influential, but can raise matters for discussion.

5.3.51 Distributed choice of preferences for tertiary courses sometimes leads to questions about personal focus.

5.3.52 Discussion based on consideration of particular cases indicated that interview either failed to sustain expectations raised by written material, or produced new and more impressive evidence – linked to factors listed above.

5.3.53 Step 3 was reached by 22 applicants, of whom 17 received offers. Yet it was said that very few applicants are formally rejected at this stage – and only after a good deal of consideration between Faculty-level and discipline-area assessors.

5.3.54 This was explained by the formative nature of this step. Apparently some applicants find their prior ideas about research or a field do not stand up to what they discover at this stage, helped by close discussion with relevant academic staff. One consequence is that some applicants decide on a more conventional course of action, eg to study for graduate entry to a medical course, or to move at normal pace, possibly to honours.

A Course-based TAFE Selection Process.

5.3.55 A group of teaching staff conduct selection for the Certificate III in Information Technology course, Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE. The group selects applicants to all levels of courses simultaneously, eg Certificates II, III and IV in both full- and part-time modes.

5.3.56 Applicants are asked to make a case for admission, and judgments are made qualitatively.

- 5.3.57 Staff held the firm opinion that there is a gap in knowledge and skills between Year 12 IT studies in conventional secondary schooling, and study in an IT TAFE Certificate III. Staff seem to see their course in some way to have its finger on the pulse of a rapidly changing environment, whilst schools were essentially out of touch, static organizations.
- 5.3.58 Further, there was a perception held by staff that many applicants have little real understanding about what course they should be applying for in relation to their ability levels.
- 5.3.59 This type of belief was also expressed through consternation expressed by staff over other TAFE institutes taking similar students into IT diploma courses directly from Year 12, yet achieving successful outcomes.
- 5.3.60 In this context of staff beliefs, the initial sorting and re-matching of applications to “appropriate” courses comprises some form of course counselling based on the paper evidence – albeit with the applicant *in absentia*.
- 5.3.61 Viewed from the perspective of the project team, TAFE courses in IT tend to be highly specialist and focussed, whereas secondary courses are much more general in purpose and content.
- 5.3.62 School recommendations or reports by Principals or subject teachers were given little credence. In relation to school subject results, IT and mathematics subjects were viewed as important, but other subjects were of little influence in decision making.
- 5.3.63 Staff indicated that during the selection process certain applicants became benchmarks against which other applicants were judged. This was a dynamic process with the “benchmark” applicants changing throughout the process.
- 5.3.64 Staff raised the issue of the use of simple algorithms and expert judgement but were not agreed about whether those algorithms were based on their educational or IT expertise and experience. Given this view it is probably not surprising that they considered it impossible for anyone other than someone with an IT background to do the selection.
- 5.3.65 Staff were sensitive to the logistics and costs of the selection process. They felt that were they to interview all applicants, the likelihood of selecting the “right” students would be increased. There were tensions about whether conducting the selection process came within the scope of their paid duties, and suggestions the process should be institute-based, or devolved to QTAC.
- 5.3.66 These sensitivities appeared to be linked to concerns, mentioned above, about the processes said to be used by other institutes to recruit students; for example using

the QTAC process to recruit students into certificate courses under the auspices of a diploma course.

- 5.3.67 Staff acknowledged that, given time constraints and the increasing numbers of applicants, interviews would be impossible to conduct. In future years, it was suggested, some type of computerised filter test might be implemented, with an expected benefit that the resultant selection would be easier to justify.
- 5.3.68 Staff do not appear to use any form of numerical basis for ranking students for selection.
- 5.3.69 One of the implications of asking applicants to make a case for their inclusion in the course is that it underlines and emphasises the qualitative nature of the selection process being used. It also invites the use of different sub-sets of evidence.
- 5.3.70 There was a sense at Cooloola that additional information was unappreciated, since staff were looking for quite specific indicators of relevance of prior experiences. Having said that, evidence relating to those specific indicators was not requested on the application form. What was requested in the form of written statements appears to have been largely ignored in preference to a fairly narrow set of evidence – essentially mathematics and IT subjects, and the character of previous IT study. Additional information seemed simply to get in the way and failed to expedite a process that was viewed by some as an imposition.
- 5.3.71 The characteristics drawn from these observations that might be used in the type of provision envisaged in this project are included in the next section.

5.4 FUNCTIONING ADMISSIONS MODELS OBSERVED – KEY FEATURES

Evidence – Scope and Handling

- 5.4.1 The observed range of evidence potentially available to applicants using a general alternative admissions scheme proved to be substantial.
- 5.4.2 Table 4.2 displays the range. From it, different, individual sub-sets of evidence are drawn by school-leavers using schemes employing qualitative admissions judgements.
- 5.4.3 While some types of evidence were observed to be presented fairly commonly, the variety among sub-sets put forward by individuals was considerable. Some applicants, especially those who were in any case of high competency as indicated in conventional ways, were able to present a very wide array of evidence – in some cases, it seemed, rather too much to be considered sensibly by selectors.

- 5.4.4 The potential for even greater variety among and within sub-sets presented is high, especially were a general alternative process to be introduced. It would be widely known about, and would very probably stimulate more common recording and use of alternative evidence.
- 5.4.5 Among the schemes observed, there was also variety in some other evidence factors.
- 5.4.6 There are some impressive arrangements for leading applicants to comprehend, identify, and present alternative evidence. They include “graduated” assistance, given personally or by general means such as well structured application documents, and interactive procedures by telephone or face to face. As one example, see Queensland Tertiary Courses 2000, pp 319-24.¹
- 5.4.7 Vehicles for presentation of evidence vary, including certification, written appraisals and reports by first and third parties, written argument, and oral presentation and discussion by telephone and face to face.
- 5.4.8 From fieldwork, it is clear that while some potential applicants have achievements that would be useable as evidence, there is great situational variety in factors such as whether
- achievements have been documented or recorded,
 - documentation has been captured, or
 - records will be made available by their authors or repositories, eg qualitative appraisals of work performance by secondary students.

Processes - Assessment of Evidence for Admission

- 5.4.9 At the level of use of evidence by particular institutions or QTAC for qualitative admissions judgements, there are many issues about what evidence is influential, and how evidence is assessed. Variations among schemes observed, or aspects of them, were marked.
- 5.4.10 Principal observations about how evidence was used in qualitative admissions judgement are set out in this section.
- 5.4.11 QTAC schedules and associated ranks were in some cases relied on by institutional staff, apparently to assure themselves about selection decisions, or

¹ Queensland Tertiary Courses 2000
(Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd, Brisbane – 1999)

were seen to influence or even determine the decisions. In a similar way, evidence of OP occasionally seemed to be used.

- 5.4.12 Most application procedures require that an applicant apply for a specific course or closely related suite of courses. Where more general applications are possible, the vast majority of applicants make narrow choices.
- 5.4.13 Selectors commonly experienced difficulty in viewing qualifications other than in a hierarchical sense.
- 5.4.14 There tended to be greater acceptance of the prime value of items of evidence of particular types - sometimes in a substantially but unconsciously weighted way, and varying from assessor to assessor - as opposed to establishing a gestalt based in the whole range of evidence and making a singular admission decision.
- 5.4.15 Some assessors appeared to find difficulty dealing with applicants relying principally on less usual evidence.
- 5.4.16 Algorithm based decision-making tended to be used.
- 5.4.17 In some situations, the dominant justification of alternative admissions was based on arguments to do with special consideration of disadvantage.
- 5.4.18 A “disproportionate” amount of time was involved in conducting alternative admissions procedures.
- 5.4.19 Processes tended to be constrained by the numbers of staff available for applicant assistance and for processing applications.
- 5.4.20 Even looking more widely than the schemes particularly observed, very few if any genuine “alternative” admission schemes led to admission at times outside the QTAC application cycle.
- 5.4.21 Some processes involved decision making by individual assessors, but most of the group of schemes observed involved group decision making, or at least the presence of a reference group periodically engaged by individual assessors.
- 5.4.22 There was often a broad, faculty based sensitivity about ethical or accountability issues, ie as against the use of TERs, or in respect of one applicant as against another using a scheme, but with little or no evidence of either academic or public concern being expressed.
- 5.4.23 Perhaps because of this, and despite the high public profile and acceptance of many alternative or special entry schemes, institutional staff often exhibited a sense of insecurity about their admissions judgements. This was usually about a

scheme's long term viability or acceptance in their institutions, or by "comparability" – thought about in a loose way – with those applicants not dealt with under the particular alternative scheme.

- 5.4.24 There was little evidence of clearly defined procedural guidelines or criteria for making judgements, or of the use of moderation procedures. Perhaps because of feeling personally exposed in terms of the two preceding paragraphs, assessors occasionally conveyed a sense of discomfort about the presence of observers from this project, despite their efforts to appear and be benign.
- 5.4.25 Performance tracking of applicants admitted on an alternative basis was generally available only at an anecdotal level.
- 5.4.26 Some schemes were conducted by very experienced assessors with evidently substantial accumulated personal references against which to consider particular evidence. Others involved relatively inexperienced staff. Little training or planned development of assessors occurs.
- 5.4.27 Some schemes are well embedded in their institutions' policies and administrative arrangements, operate confidently and apparently rationally, enjoy the obvious support of academics, and have the capability to receive and deal with wide-ranging evidence. Others are uncertain of their processes and rationales, and exhibit some idiosyncratic judgmental behaviour.

5.5 CHARACTER OF A MORE GENERAL ALTERNATIVE ADMISSIONS SYSTEM

- 5.5.1 To set desirable characteristics for a general alternative admissions model for school-leavers, the project team:
- considered the political and social settings for selection for tertiary admission that has developed in Queensland – see Chapter 3;
 - drew on observations of operating schemes using qualitative judgments – see Chapters 4 and 5 – and on professional opinion on the conduct of holistic qualitative decision making using incommensurate elements of evidence; and
 - took account of the practicalities of the Queensland setting.

The Setting

- 5.5.2 Principal factors taken into account derived from the Queensland political and social settings are:

- The use of non-TER evidence to secure admission to tertiary courses is accepted, clearly for “mature-age” candidates, and increasingly for school-leaver applicants through both institutional and QTAC processes.
- Pressure from various sources for broadening the evidence used generally in assessing the eligibility of school-leavers for tertiary entry, eg vocational education performance.
- Many tertiary institutions already conduct entry schemes, including for mainstream entry, eg some TAFE AQF I – IV courses, and Bond University undergraduate admission. The schemes depend to varying extent on:
 - judgement of applicant-driven sets of qualitative and / or quantitative evidence, and
 - elements of assessment and admissions selection processes.
- Some institutions are relaxing pre-requisite requirements, or offering places virtually direct on the basis of school-based holistic judgments about applicant suitability for particular courses.

Desirable Core Characteristics – Evidence, Assessment and Processes

- 5.5.3 Based on this project’s observations of the achievements of schemes conducted in Queensland using qualitative evidence, there seems to be a core of desirable characteristics for a general alternative admissions model. Related issues of institutional acceptance and administrative practicability raised by some desirable characteristics are addressed in the next section.
- 5.5.4 **Evidence and Application.** The range of types of quantitative and qualitative evidence suitable for presentation, and notions of presentation structure, should be made visible to potential applicants, but not in the form of detailed application archetypes.
- 5.5.5 **Communication.** Communication about the scheme, as part of the application process, and during assessment of applications, should make use of multiple media and communication vehicles, including informed third parties, and enable different media to be used for making applications, eg visual media, direct or telephone interview.
- 5.5.6 **Applicant Development.** Communication and advising directed to potential and actual applicants under alternative admissions schemes should be useable in a

graduated way, as a means of developing their understanding of the notion and use of “evidence” and the relevance of particular evidence to their objectives.

- 5.5.7 **Concentration on Appropriate Applicants.** This application route should initially be made available only to the school-leavers for whom it is intended – those with a non-conventional senior secondary schooling – rather than become an additional route for those proceeding conventionally, or those seeking special consideration on grounds of disadvantage. However, those eligible to receive a TER, but able to present convincingly substantial alternative evidence of non-conventional achievement at a level beyond that suggested by their TERs, and acceptable to the process, should be included in the “non-conventional” category as the scheme becomes established.
- 5.5.8 **Choice and Economy for Applicants and System.** An applicant should be required to submit one core application, supplemented by evidence specifically relevant to the particular fields of study in which admission is sought. However, on the basis of observed experience in the field of requiring only one set of evidence, and given the proposal in para. 5.5.6, relatively focussed course choice is expected.
- 5.5.9 **Continual Admissions.** Gaining the capability to present the evidence required by this model is not governed by the passage of a conventional school year; nor is a holistic admissions process governed by conventional tertiary institution calendars. Thus, the process should be continual, leading to timely decisions enabling candidates to proceed to different ways of progressing to their goals. Timing of entry to many courses would nevertheless be subject to institutional calendars.
- 5.5.10 **Admissions rather than Assessment Focus, using Holistic Judgment.** The core process should deliver a binary admission decision based on the assessment of sub-sets of possibly disparate evidence presented by individual applicants, for entry to one course, possibly from a set of preferred courses in one broad but cognate field, and ranked by the applicant.
- 5.5.11 Thus, in the broader scope of evidence presentable, there would be a marked difference from evidence presentable for consideration against QTAC schedules, even though these are based on general qualitative judgments.
- 5.5.12 **Validity and Confidence.** The process should be seen by applicants and institutions as having validity, by providing equitably for the legitimate needs of a discernable set of applicants in the Queensland admissions context. Thus, it should be based on procedures developed from those in use by QTAC and the tertiary institutions, and located in a central agency such as QTAC. It should - possibly in that way - produce confidence in its work.

- 5.5.13 **Qualified Assessors.** Assessors should be trained and continually developed to enable them to maintain, as individuals within a group of assessors, and as a group, a level of lateral and longitudinal consistency in making admissions judgments that has at least a reasonable resemblance to the extent of consistency across existing devices such as TERs, and TERs(OE) based on QTAC schedules.

Issues – Achieving Core Characteristics

- 5.5.14 Contemplating achieving those desirable core characteristics produces some potential political, organisational, and personnel issues.
- 5.5.15 **Admission decisions.** It was observed that a good deal but not all of the practice of local admissions decision making was reduced to consideration of a limited number of types of evidence, frequently of conventional character, reflecting the special field of the course. There was little or no reference to, and sometimes overt rejection of, values placed by other courses and institutions on particular types of evidence.
- 5.5.16 Arising from those factors is the issue of securing confidence in the operational alternative admissions procedures, operating beyond the perceived control of teaching elements. However, the level of local control of the process being contemplated is not essentially different from the use of intervening machinery for the derivation of ranks from teachers' assessments in schools or from schedules of codified levels of evidence to which ranks have been attached by deliberative procedures.
- 5.5.17 What machinery and procedures would here be perceived acceptable?
- 5.5.18 **Assessors.** In any single, shared alternative admissions process, the operational assessing personnel would almost certainly be predominantly made up of professional administrative staff.
- 5.5.19 Limited effort and expenditure appear to go to the professional development of assessors in understanding or applying principles of qualitative decision making and assessment, or to increasing their understanding of the comparative effectiveness of their judgments – from the perspective of the recipient teaching elements, or in terms of individual student achievement. Learning about this operation is currently an on-the-job process.
- 5.5.20 How might long-term and self-renewing proficiency and consistency in assessment be developed within groups of professional administrators making individual holistic admissions judgments?
- 5.5.21 **Binary Decisions, or Ranks?** Is there to be any numerical limit (quota) defined for the admission of school-leaver applicants by holistic judgment? If so, are they to be ranked, or admitted on a first-come, first-served basis? If not, how should

- they be compared with applicants admitted by other means, eg TERs and TERs (OE)?
- 5.5.22 In various ways, the notions behind those questions can be glimpsed in the present schemes observed.
- 5.5.23 For competitive courses, a sub-quota might be used. For courses in modest demand, and if alternative entry numbers are small, there might be no need for a quota – this is one present common practice. Alternatively, a limited scale of bands, each approximating to a bundle of TERs or TERs(OE), might be used by assessors to classify their holistic decisions in a coarse way. It seems to be remembered that many of the present QTAC schedules in common use are but one remove from gradations of evidence arrived at qualitatively. Likewise, TERs themselves rely ultimately on qualitative judgement made about the performance of individuals.
- 5.5.24 **Control of Qualitative Decision Taking.** Institutions and their instructional elements have been prepared to place in the hands of others, outside the institutions, the ranking for admission of a very considerable number of new undergraduate applicants. This includes, for example, the use of TERs, and TERs (OE) for “mature” students allocated on the basis of matching applicant evidence to QTAC schedules. There are a few exceptions – Bond University, and some TAFE courses are two.
- 5.5.25 Alternative admissions procedures (sometimes not specifically) for school-leavers conducted by institutions tend to admit either candidates in comparatively small numbers, or candidates to courses that are not especially competitive. Local ownership of these qualitative processes requiring evidently individual decisions appears to be strong. This appears to reflect at their respective levels the desire of instructional elements – essentially academic staff - and institutions to control this particular method of selection of their own students. Those admission decisions are quite commonly taken *de facto* or *de jure* by general staff.
- 5.5.26 How prepared would institutions and elements be to accept others’ judgments about this numerically marginal group?
- 5.5.27 **Recognition of Contemporary Evidence.** An equitable process for alternative admission for school-leavers needs to keep pace with the types of evidence likely progressively to become presentable by people in the school-leaver age group – possibly before assessors or teaching personnel become particularly attuned to its relevance. Currently types of such emerging evidence might be found in, eg:
- personal mastery of electronic media and processing, including non-verbal imaging and expression, as an ancillary skill facilitating conventional school or vocational achievement; or

- cross-cultural competencies as in communication, or program implementation, or bringing about constructive change, in ethnic-cultural or special-needs sub-communities.
- 5.5.28 How might the assessment process continually identify relevant contemporary evidence, and how might acceptance of an admissions process using emerging types of evidence be obtained among teaching elements to whom people are granted admission from the alternative process?
- 5.5.29 **Resources.** Especially for schemes with interactive or informative programs to assist prospective applicants, or using interviews, conducting assessment of qualitative evidence is costly of staff time. The cost of most schemes is justified by their operators, and apparently by institutions, in terms of at least one of:
- social duty – providing for disability or disadvantage, personal or regional;
 - beneficial for a particular course – helps meet enrolment targets, or chooses applicants with relevant special qualitative characteristics, eg potential research scientists, or potentially effective in a particular computing application;
 - particularly suited to selecting students likely to succeed in fee-paying, full-year courses.
- 5.5.30 To the project team, the preparedness of institutions to conduct alternative schemes for social reasons alone has decreased during the last decade or two – perhaps as accessibility of tertiary places has increased, and the scope of QTAC schedules has increased.
- 5.5.31 In some cases, the cost of qualitative admissions processing is apparently not identified in budgets. In others, at least some of the cost is made clear.
- 5.5.32 How would an alternative admissions process be funded? Need such a scheme be separately funded?

5.6 A GENERAL ALTERNATIVE ADMISSIONS MODEL

- 5.6.1 By drawing on actual practice in institutions, and considering the factors set out particularly in section 5.5, a model alternative admissions system was constructed. The features of the model are explained here, and its process illustrated in Diagram 5.1 below. Since most of the foundation elements of a possible model have been considered earlier in this report, the descriptions here are concise. The model is described in four parts:
- Application and Evidence.

- Holistic, Consistent Selection Processes.
- Calibrated Selectors.
- Organisation and Management.

Making Application for Admission

- 5.6.2 Emphasis in the application stage of the model is on developing understanding on the part of school-leavers who are the object of this project, and their advisers, of the availability of an alternative admissions process, and the identification and presentation of appropriate evidence. Thus, the model includes the following features to do with applications and evidence.
- 5.6.3 **Education of Target Applicants and their Advisers.** Continual advice is available to target applicants, and continual development of general and specifically relevant advisers is promoted, by such means as:
- **General Admissions Promotion.** Use of conventional, eg QTAC, and emerging multi-media vehicles to present the general alternative admissions route, including public advertisement and schools' advisers.
 - **Extension of Coverage.** To agencies that deal with school-leavers moving in training or vocational (on-the-job) streams – remembering that part-time study traditionally is significant for people in these streams.
 - **Identification and Presentation of Evidence.** Promotion of school-counsellor skills in guiding potential applicants, and developing a comprehensive notion of evidence; and use of information and application machinery and documentation to offer a graduated approach to understanding and using the process.
- 5.6.4 **Assessor Contact with Advisers.** Periodically, assessors and applicant advisers provide mutual feedback on treatment of evidence. (paras 5.6.30-31)
- 5.6.5 **Concentration on Target Applicants.** Clear advice is given on the application profile required for acceptance for consideration, and screening at point of receipt.
- 5.6.6 **Continual Consideration of Applications.** Applications are received continually, or at frequent intervals, and determined promptly even though tertiary entry might occur later in an annual cycle.
- 5.6.7 **One Core Application.** Given the holistic character of the process, only one core application is required – with minimal additional requirements if application covers more than one broad field.

5.6.8 **Multiple Vehicles for Application and Submission of Evidence.** As well as accepting applications in different media, evidence in different forms and vehicles is considered.

5.6.9 **Interactive Collection of Evidence.** A possible – maybe mandatory – part of the process for presenting some evidence, is direct interaction with applicants during the selection process, during face-to-face, teleconference, telephone, or e-mail interview – accepting differential methods as necessary in a country where travel distances and expenses are potentially great. See Diagram 5.1.

Holistic, Consistent Selection Processes

5.6.10 The selection process is:

- a holistic, binary selection decision,
 - either to admit to the highest preferred nominated course for which judged admissible, or decline admission; or
 - to admit conditionally, and allocate to one of a small number (3 or 4) of hierarchical bands relating to a broad field of study, or decline admission;
- using evidence generated or presented by the applicant, possibly supplemented by evidence elicited during interview; and
- undertaken by a selector drawn from a collaborating team of trained selectors.

5.6.11 Thus, the model includes the following features to do with selection. (Diagram 5.1 deals principally with the selection process aspects of this model, which it illustrates and explains in footnotes.)

5.6.12 **Evidence.** Sub-sets of evidence, possibly of disparate character, are considered in relation to tertiary readiness and nominated preferred course(s).

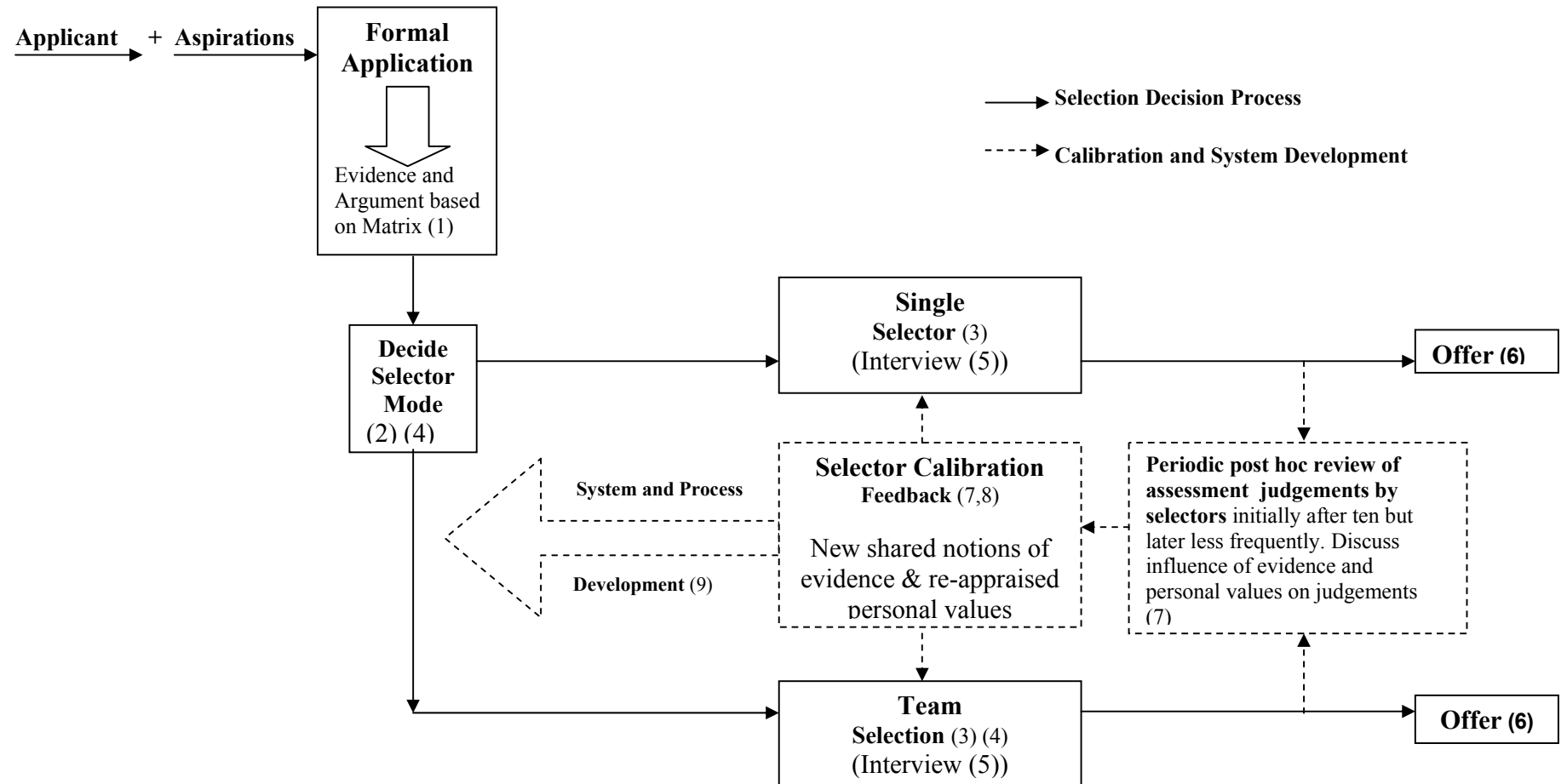
5.6.13 **Selection.** The consideration of evidence is directed toward making a holistic decision to admit to the most preferred nominated course for which judged admissible - considering aspects of general tertiary readiness as well as suitability for admission to particular courses – or to decline admission.

5.6.14 **Use of Selectors.** The preferred method is for the consideration of an applicant's evidence to be conducted by one calibrated selector (see below) from a collaborative team – except where a selector decides that a team consideration and judgment is preferable, eg for a rarely sought course, or where the selector's

experience is limited, or the evidence sub-set is unusual. (Note also the use of team work for selector calibration – paragraph 5.6.27-29)

- 5.6.15 **Interviews.** Prospectively, in the expectation that use of an alternative admissions scheme would be small, the use of face-to-face, telephone, teleconference, or email interview would be at least offered, and possibly be mandatory. Alternatively, an interview might be required if specified for admission to particular courses.
- 5.6.16 **Ranking.** Although the preferred focus of selection is on binary choice, and continual application and admission, one method of dealing with competitive applications for popular courses might be to allocate each of those admitted to one of three or four hierarchical bands. Course preferences would then come into play in the same way as with the mainstream QTAC offer process.

Diagram 5.1: Calibrated Selection and Alternative Admission Model



Footnotes to Diagram 5.1:

1. Application couched in terms of recognised types of evidence, addressing tertiary and course-/field-specific readiness.
2. Decision, according to code of practice, to use individual or team selection; or decision by sole selector to refer an application to selection team.
3. Normal treatment of application, in parallel with other sole selectors working on different applications.
4. Team-based selection:
 - **option for unusual cases;**
 - **referral by sole selector;**
 - **optional adjunct to selector calibration procedures. (7)**
 - **used in specified courses, eg low alternative demand, or high level of competition.**
5. Interview:
 - **as normal treatment;**
 - **for specified courses; or**
 - **in unusual cases.**
6. Non-conditional offer made as part of continual admissions process. For courses where banding undertaken, offers made as part of mainstream round. Where applicant expresses course preferences, an immediate offer would be made for highest preferred course subject to binary admission decision, with possible offer in subsequent competitive offer round using “bands” (para 5.6.nnn), for higher preferred banded course.
7. Selector calibration and system feedback process, see paragraph 5.6.25-30. Involves stakeholders outside selection process.
8. Through the selector calibration process, selector values, eg concerning worth of evidence, continually developed - influenced by changing applicant character, accumulating experience of selectors, and institutional feedback. Also important part of new selector induction.
9. Systemic changes arising from feedback, eg new types of evidence recognised.

Calibrated Selectors

- 5.6.17 The establishment of trust in a process of selection for admission using qualitative judgments and potentially disparate sub-sets of evidence seems to be a crucial factor in setting up an alternative process of the sort considered here. As one process serving a multitude of courses and many institutions, teachers and admissions officers in institutions need to have sufficient confidence in such an "arm's length" system to accept students admitted by it.
- 5.6.18 To achieve this, the process of becoming perceived by the principal clients of a central alternative system for school-leavers as being equitable and reliable, the process needs to be conspicuously attentive to developing those qualities.
- 5.6.19 As has been pointed out above, other essentially qualitative, central processes admitting large numbers of students have, during the last one or two decades become accepted by the public and institutions. However, in the process of becoming perceived by the principal clients of the system as being equitable and reliable, the process needs to be conspicuously attentive to developing and displaying those qualities. This should be done at a level of public policy and customer understanding, not in expert or academic detail.
- 5.6.20 Thus, the aspect of the model set out here is a central feature - to develop and sustain "self-calibrated" selectors, part of a professional team but normally working singly.
- 5.6.21 How self-calibrated selectors contribute to the model's functioning, and to its and their maintenance, is illustrated in Diagram 5.1 (above), and explained in the main factors set out here.
- 5.6.22 **Selectors.** The proposed central-service character of the model, and the notion of continual admission, are important in considering what sorts of people would be selectors. They would be male and female graduates, with some professional educational-administrative, work, or similar experience, representing a range of course fields – eg major discipline and vocational groups. They would preferably not be employed continuously in a selector role. However, they would necessarily have sufficiently frequent and substantial selector work to do to be continual participants in the development and calibration procedures explained below.
- 5.6.23 Some might be fully engaged staff of a central admissions authority, others institutional officers with frequent spells of central duty.
- 5.6.24 **Induction and Development of Selectors.** Ideally, there is a trickle of selectors continually entering and departing the field. Some understanding of the issues affecting qualitative judgement in the alternative admissions process needs to be obtained. However, the principle method for inducting new appointees into the

work, and developing their judgmental competency while maintaining currency, is the calibration process described below.

5.6.25 **Calibration.** Calibration¹ is seen as a process that assists selectors to develop professionally in making holistic, essentially binary, qualitative judgments about individual applicants using disparate sub-sets of evidence.

5.6.26 The process is intended to bring about:

- reliable judgments by selectors working individually,
- that are as equitable as possible within a selector's series of assessments, and
- consistent when seen:
 - in lateral comparison with the contemporaneous decisions of other selectors,
 - longitudinally as decisions made over time, and
 - in terms of applicant outcomes.

5.6.27 **Self-Calibrating Team of Selectors.** Selectors working mostly individually, sometimes in small groups, need to have a sufficiently shared level of attribution of value to types of evidence, and common processing approaches, eg to interviewing, to produce consistent decisions.

5.6.28 To achieve this, the team of selectors meets periodically to review a sample of decisions already made, and to discuss individual bases for judgment. The meetings should be led by a facilitator qualified in group work and in issues affecting qualitative decision making.

5.6.29 However, the focus of the process is the selectors and their behaviour.

5.6.30 **Calibration Feedback.** Feedback operates at three levels, and involves having a small number of people from outside the team participate in calibration meetings:

¹ The notions of calibration and self-calibration were applied to the project with the professional assistance of Professor Royce Sadler, Faculty of Education, Griffith University. Reference can be made to the idea of calibration in:

Sadler, D.R. *Subjectivity, objectivity, and teachers' qualitative judgments*. Discussion paper no 5. (Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, Brisbane – 1986)

Sadler, D.R. Specifying and promulgating achievement standards. *Oxford Review of Education*, 13, 191-209.

- **Into the team.** Feedback from institutional clients and from those working with intending applicants – in both cases at the working level.
- **Within the team.** Leading to deliberate changes to their own behaviour being made by team members, and to shared elements, eg values placed on types of evidence for different purposes, or recognition of new types of evidence, or vehicle for communicating evidence.
- **From the Team.** Conveyed by occasional external participants to institutions and providers. Formally proposed as system and machinery changes.

5.6.31 **Strategic Direction.** While the emphasis for calibration and feedback is on the operating officers, the overall process needs to be placed in a realistic strategic envelope by occasional review meetings in which one or two managers at strategic admissions level discuss, receive feedback, and inform on “big picture” developments and expectations.

Structure, Location and Management

5.6.32 The alternative admissions process for school-leavers should be located in QTAC, at arm’s length, and as an existing operation, and an accepted feature of the admissions landscape, that actually handles quite high levels of qualitative admissions decision making – including some judgmental work involving disparate evidence.

5.6.33 This location facilitates management, and budget and collection of service fees, without the need for additional structures.

5.6.34 Further, it permits deliberate separation of applications based on requests for special consideration on grounds of disability or disadvantage, from an essentially normal process for school-leavers presenting non-conventional evidence.

5.6.35 The effective management of the team of selectors, especially their self-calibrating development, participation in giving and receiving feedback, and gradual turnover, requires appropriate qualification, leadership, understanding, vision and insight. This is additional to the general management of an alternative process.