

Do you need an ATAR to get into Uni?

There seems to be a widespread belief that you need an [ATAR](#) to get into an Australian university. Indeed, based on their research with students and teachers, [O'Shea & Groves \(2020\)](#) identified that

Overwhelmingly, when asked what they had wished they had known in high school, current university students told us that they had wished they had known about alternative pathways and that

'ATARs aren't like, the be all and end all' (Jasmine, 18, Bachelor of Information Technology)

Analysis of the information published on Australian higher education providers' websites in September 2020 makes it clear that there are multiple routes into undergraduate study, only some of which require an ATAR.

Figure 1 shows the basis on which domestic students were admitted onto undergraduate courses for the majority¹ of Australian higher education providers in 2019 or 2020 (different universities published data for different intakes).

There are four categories of entrants which "relate primarily to the most relevant study or work background of the applicant" (Australia & Department of Education, [2017](#), p. 26). These are:

1) Higher education study (including bridging and enabling courses)

2) Vocational education training (VET) study after leaving school

3) Recent secondary education (i.e. within the last two years)

4) Work and life experience for those who left secondary education more than two years previously and did not fit into category 1 or 2

Students are allocated to the first category that applies to them.

The third category, Recent secondary education, is divided further into three sub-categories, based:

- **solely on ATAR entry, including ATAR related adjustments** (e.g. ATAR+5 ranking for being from a low SES category or for being an elite athlete)
- **on ATAR + other criteria (e.g. portfolio, audition, interview)**
- **on criteria that did NOT include the ATAR** (i.e. ATAR was NOT a factor)

This results in the six overall entry categories² in Figure 1.

¹ The Federation University of Australia has been omitted from the figures because they did not provide a breakdown of their 'school leaver' data.

² For full explanations of the six categories of entrants see Australian Government (2017 Appendix B)

Figure 1 Basis for domestic student entry to undergraduate study in Australia

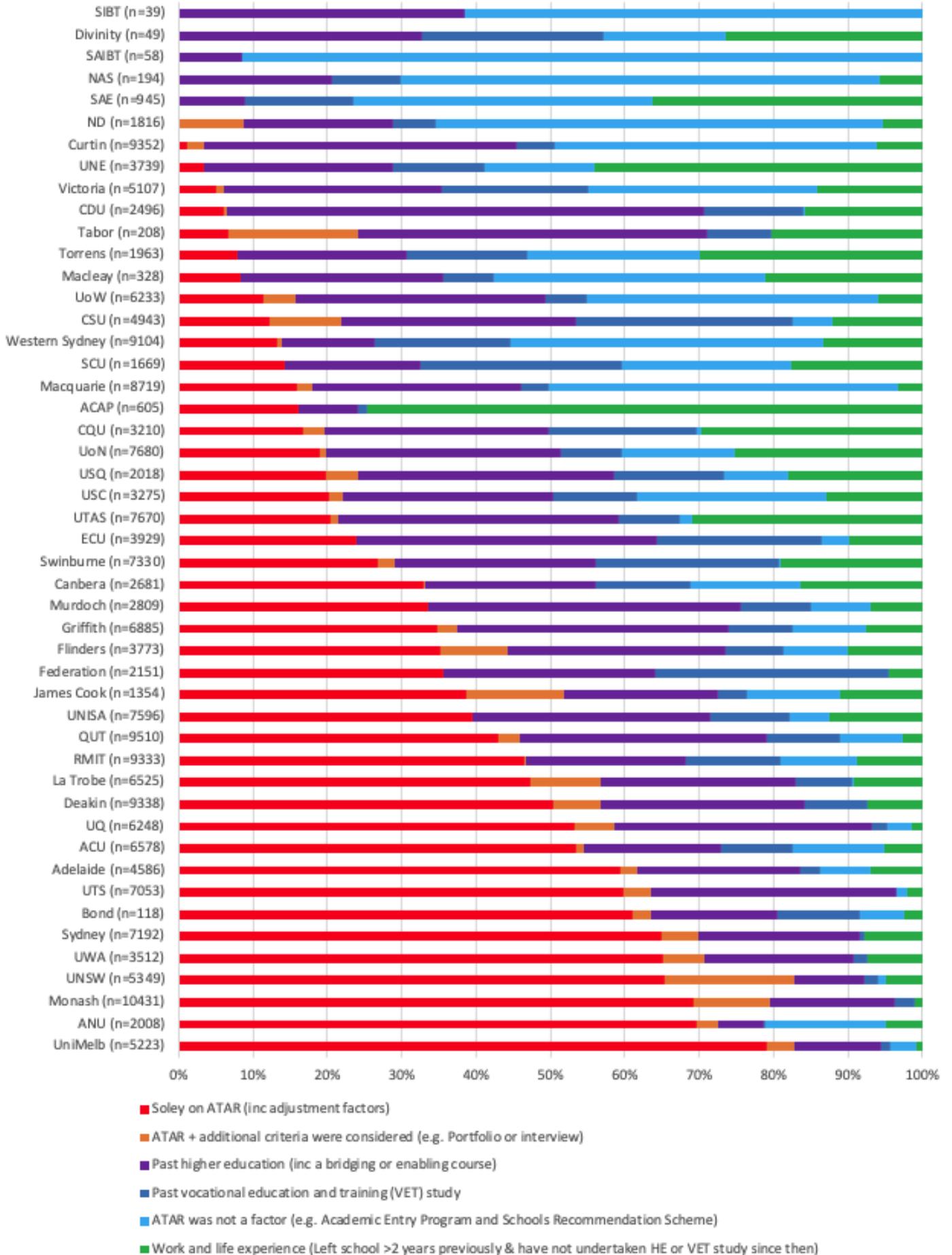


Figure 1 shows that there were:

- only 12 universities where the **ATAR on its own** accounted for over 50% of enrollments – these included all of the elite G8 universities
- only 14 universities where the **ATAR contributed** (on its own or with other criteria) to the entry requirements for over 50% of enrolments
- 16 providers that admitted more than 50% of school leavers onto their undergraduate programmes based on a factor that did **not include their ATAR** at all.

Of the 212,932 domestic students that this data shows as having started their undergraduate study in Australia **the vast majority (69%) did NOT use an ATAR to gain entry**. This appears to be roughly in line with the data for 2018 - [Pitman \(2019\)](#) reports that of the roughly 279,000 students made an offer to study at a higher education institution in 2018 58% did not have an ATAR.

So, you may well need an ATAR if you want to go to one of the elite Australian universities. However, **for most students, the ATAR is not necessary** in order to get into higher education in Australia.



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