PERFORMANCE REPORT

Unis should rely less on using ATAR scores

Bethany Hiett
Education Editor

Universities should reduce their reliance on Year 12 Australian Tertiary Admission Rank scores when selecting potential students because they are a poor predictor of future performance, a report recommends.

The ATAR, calculated on Year 12 results in a student’s four best subjects, has previously been widely recognised as one of the best predictors of university success. But a study involving 26,000 students at Victoria University in Melbourne from 2009 to 2012 found it was a weak predictor of academic performance for first-year students.

Victoria Institute for Strategic Economic Studies senior research fellow George Messinis said that while students with high ATARs achieved higher first-year university marks on average, many high-ATAR students also achieved low marks and many low-ATAR students achieved high marks.

“This suggests that more sophisticated approaches are needed to determine students’ readiness for university study,” he said.

Dr Messinis said universities should place more emphasis on students’ other experiences, skills and motivation to better match their abilities with course selection.

And schools and parents should not focus so much energy on ATAR scores.

He hoped the research would spark widespread community debate about the importance of ATARS.

“We need to go beyond ATAR scores,” he said. “Rather than abolishing them, I think we need to complement them with extra information.”

Dr Messinis said ATAR scores were still statistically significant in linking school achievement with early success at university, but they should not be used in isolation.

Other factors such as age, gender, socio-economic background and English proficiency also played a big role in student achievement.

The report, which was backed by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education at Curtin University, reflects an earlier WA study which showed that students from disadvantaged schools tended to do better at university than those with similar entry scores from schools in more privileged areas.

Dr Messinis said the findings reinforced the importance of providing extra support to poor students with low ATAR scores to help them succeed in their studies.

Snow falls on Freo

Natalie Brown

Wandering through Fremantle Esplanade this July, you could be forgiven for thinking that you’d stumbled across a European city in the midst of a cold snap.

It wasn’t just the 800-metre ice skating rink, the snow slide and the mini snow lodges but also the WA debut of a high-tech Italian snow machine that is tipped to be the biggest drawcard for the Winter Garden.

The Event Agency, organisers of Perth’s sell-out skating rink last year, imported the snow machine for the festival’s return to Fremantle from July 1.

Managing director Nikki Grasaki said the machine would pump out 30 tonnes of snow over the 16-day festival for which organisers hope attendance will double to 60,000 compared with the last Fremantle event in 2012.

“Last year in Perth, when we were unpacking the snow from the ice rink, kids were picking it up from the sides and throwing it,” Ms Grasaki said. “I think it’s just that touch and feel experience they’re wanting. There will be snow falling while they’re skating.”

Fremantle mayor Brad Pettitt said the likely tourism boost would be welcome during a winter lull.