

Intermediate A Quarter Finals

TOPIC: *that we regret the emphasis placed on the ATAR*

1. Type of Topic: This is an empirical/counterfactual debate. This means that both teams should **not** present a model. Instead, the debate is centred around comparing the current world (where the ATAR is emphasised) to a world where emphasis on the ATAR is significantly reduced or eliminated. This involves **both** teams creating and describing a 'counterfactual' world where the change has taken place. For example, the affirmative team should justify why the counterfactual world (where the ATAR is not emphasised) would occur, how it would function (i.e. what would the focus be instead) and what better outcomes their world would lead to. The negative team should defend why emphasis on the ATAR is necessary and outline negative consequences associated with the affirmative's counterfactual.

2. Background/Context:

The ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) is a critical factor in determining university admissions in Australia. It is a ranking system that compares students' academic performance in their final year of high school, with the aim of providing a standardised measure for university admissions. The ATAR is often seen as the ultimate determinant of a student's future opportunities, leading to intense pressure on students to perform well in their exams. This emphasis has been criticised for creating a narrow focus on exam results at the expense of broader educational experiences and well-being. Critics argue that the ATAR fails to capture the full range of a student's abilities and potential, and that it can exacerbate stress and anxiety. On the other hand, supporters argue that the ATAR provides a clear, standardised measure of academic achievement that is crucial for fair and merit-based university admissions.

3. Specific Questions for Consideration

- What role does standardisation play in ensuring fairness in university admissions?
- Could a reduction in emphasis on the ATAR lead to inconsistencies and biases in the admissions process?
- What would the educational landscape look like in a world where the ATAR is not the primary determinant of university admissions? (counterfactual)
- How might reducing emphasis on the ATAR allow for more diverse and individualised educational pathways for students?
- Would alternative assessment methods (e.g., continuous assessment, portfolios) provide a more accurate reflection of a student's abilities and potential?

- How does the current emphasis on the ATAR impact student mental health and well-being? Would a counterfactual world with less emphasis on the ATAR result in reduced stress and anxiety among students?
- How might reducing the emphasis on the ATAR affect students from different socioeconomic backgrounds? Would alternative assessment methods help to level the playing field, or could they introduce new forms of inequality?
- Would a reduction in the emphasis on the ATAR change the way students and parents approach education and university admissions?

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