

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is Australia's independent national regulator of the higher education sector. This bulletin is issued on behalf of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) to provide an update on developments in the sector relating to TEQSA and higher education standards.

## LATEST NEWS...Review calls to lighten universities' regulatory burden

On 5 August, the Federal Government released a report on the [Review of Higher Education Regulation](#). The review was established in May to address sector concerns about the amount of "red tape" and duplication associated with the current regulatory system.

Conducted by an expert panel, the review supports the continuation of TEQSA, but recommends changes to its role, its approach to regulation and the legislative framework in which it operates. The review argues that TEQSA's dual role as both regulator and quality assurer is problematic and recommends that the focus be on the former. The review proposes that the QA functions should be handed over to another body. The report also says that TEQSA has erred in adopting a "top-down command" approach to regulation and needs to shift to a "**regulator as partner**" approach. The review also supports the notion of "**earned autonomy**" (whereby established institutions have less onerous reporting requirements) saying that it is perfectly in line with the original intention of the TEQSA Act.

In addition, the report calls on the government to reduce the duplication in reporting, the duplication across the four regulatory Acts, and to better align the work of existing players, such as the Higher Education Standards Panel and the Australian Qualifications Framework Council. The report contains 11 recommendations in all (see summary below) and can be accessed from <http://www.innovation.gov.au/HigherEducation/Policy/HEAssuringQuality/Pages/default.aspx>

While the Tertiary Education Minister, Senator Kim Carr, has committed to giving universities more autonomy, it remains to be seen how a new federal government will respond to the report.

In the meantime, TEQSA has already indicated its willingness to consider a more nuanced approach to regulation, announcing that from the start of 2014 it will make changes to the re-registration and accreditation processes to provide a **streamlined approach for providers assessed as low risk**. You can read more at <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/news-publications>

## TEQSA's Risk Assessment of UOW

TEQSA has rated UOW as "low" risk in 30 out of 32 risk indicators.

UOW received its final risk assessment in June as part of the first round of assessments conducted across the sector in 2012. TEQSA's [Regulatory Risk Framework](#) plots risks against the [Threshold Standards](#) and is an important reference point for re-registration. The two risk indicators for which we have been rated as "moderate" are "offshore delivery" and "high international student profile".

With TEQSA's newly announced streamlined approach to regulation for low risk providers, this should mean that our re-registration process (not due until March 2018) will be less onerous than previously expected. It is also likely to be focused on a smaller number of specific standards, including those relating to international student support, equivalence of learning outcomes across locations and third party/offshore delivery.

### AT A GLANCE: Review Report Recommendations

#### Federal Government should:

- reduce TEQSA's functions to focus on its core activities as a regulator
- establish mechanisms for TEQSA to consult with stakeholders and receive sector advice
- reduce duplication across the different regulatory bodies
- align better the work of existing players, such as the Higher Education Standards Panel and the AQF Council ... and address concerns for the sector regarding the role of the AQF
- reduce duplication between the four Acts
- better align registration for dual sector providers
- engage with TEQSA to agree where duplication of reporting can be addressed immediately
- identify as soon as possible a single national higher education data collection agency

#### TEQSA should:

- detail how the principles of risk, necessity and proportionality apply to different types of providers
- streamline the re-registration processes for established providers
- prioritise improved timeliness in delivering its key activities of initial provider registration and course accreditation

## TEQSA's Quality Assessment of Third Party Arrangements

TEQSA's first Quality Assessment of higher education providers was viewed as onerous and ill-targeted by many in the sector. It was, in part, one of the triggers for the review of higher education regulation. The assessment, which looked at **third party arrangements for delivery of courses and student services**, was conducted via a mandatory online survey during March-May.

Following the analysis of responses, TEQSA's next step will be to develop case studies, however, participation in this part of the quality assessment will be voluntary. It expects to provide a *sector wide* report to the Minister and providers by the end of 2013.

The development of UOW's response was overseen by a TEQSA Steering Group, led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), in consultation with faculties and relevant professional units.

### What did we learn?

At its 'wash-up' meeting on 18 June, the Steering Group considered what had been learnt through the process and looked at ways we can better manage and monitor third party arrangements. The meeting identified 15 main areas for improvement under four broad headings: Planning & Policy; Governance & Management; Quality Assurance and Students.

The TEQSA survey did not differentiate between onshore and offshore arrangements for third party delivery of courses and student services – all were treated the same. This forced the University to view its arrangements using a different lens. The picture that emerged is one of unevenness – we have strong contract management and QA procedures around offshore third party activity, while some of the onshore activity has occurred in a less co-ordinated manner. In addition, there remain some issues around the implementation of policies and procedures and establishing evidence of equivalence regarding the quality of the student learning experience across all locations.

A revised **Standards & Quality Improvement Plan**, incorporating the Steering Group's 15 recommendations, is being considered by the Standards & Quality Subcommittee (SAQS) for progress to the University Education Committee (UEC) and Academic Senate. For further information, contact Jan Sullivan on 4221 3573 or [jsulliva@uow.edu.au](mailto:jsulliva@uow.edu.au)

## UPCOMING TEQSA Events

- ✉ The next **TEQSA Provider Briefing** will be held in Melbourne on Thursday **3 October 2013**. The briefing will include an update for the higher education sector on developments in TEQSA's regulatory approach, how TEQSA is responding to sector feedback on its processes, and it will include tailored sessions of interest to specific providers.
- ✉ On Friday **4 October 2013**, TEQSA and the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) will be hosting a **Forum on eLearning** in Melbourne. The forum will showcase current OLT research projects on standards for distance education and e-assessment and focus on the implications of these developments for strategic planning, teaching, learning and quality assurance of higher education.

Invitations to register for both these events will be directed to the Vice-Chancellor's Unit.

## TEQSA and 'Teach Out' Arrangements

'Teach out' is a situation where no new students can be enrolled in a course of study, and arrangements are in place to ensure that all existing enrolled students can either complete the course of study or transition to a mutually agreed course at no disadvantage to the student.

Higher education providers are obliged under the Threshold Standards (section 6.2 of the Provider Course Accreditation Standards) to have **effective teach out or course transition plans** in place.

TEQSA has published information on '**teach-out arrangements**' at <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/for-providers/course-accreditation/teach-out>.

## AQS New Academic Quality & Standards Unit

The new Academic Quality & Standards Unit (AQS), established under the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) portfolio, has responsibility for all TEQSA, AQF and CRICOS matters. Further information about AQS is available at <https://intranet.uow.edu.au/planquality/>. Questions can be directed to [quality@uow.edu.au](mailto:quality@uow.edu.au).