TERTIARY EDUCATION QUALITY AND STANDARDS AGENCY
SECTOR UPDATE
May 2011

A MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM CHAIR

Last month Ian Hawke and I were both able to spend time with people from Europe and the UK who are intimately engaged with higher education reform. Our discussions left me with the strong sense that not only are we on the right path for effective and sustainable higher education regulation in a globalised and competitive market here, but that we truly have the opportunity to provide international leadership in this area. All countries are grappling with the problem of how to support increased participation and diversity of providers while ensuring the quality of outcomes is not compromised. The regulatory approach that we are pioneering is truly innovative and has begun to attract attention because it seems, not just to us, that it will offer a new and more efficient way of operating. Very exciting!

I welcome the report from the Senate Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations on the TEQSA legislation. Its recommendations are in the spirit of the objectives for TEQSA and I am certainly delighted that they believe the consultations around developing the legislation have been open and collaborative. It now seems that we are on course for the legislation being addressed in the autumn term.

I would like too to farewell and congratulate John Smyth. He has done a great job with Kaye Schofield in establishing the Australian Skills Quality Agency in an extraordinary tight timeline. The team at ASQA, with, mercifully, Kaye’s continuing leadership has kept up the momentum since his departure and is continuing to work closely with us to align policies, processes and approaches. The work being undertaken by both agencies at present should position us well to establish a more coordinated and efficient regulatory experience for all tertiary education providers later down the track.

Advertisements for the most senior positions in TEQSA are now open. Applications close on Sunday 12 June 2011. To be part of guiding and implementing a quite unique national approach to a major policy dilemma is a rare chance for anyone who likes to work at the cutting edge. I do hope some of our movers and shakers in institutions and in professional bodies will think very seriously about the opportunities these positions afford to do something significant.

LEGISLATION UPDATE


The Committee was supportive of the establishment of TEQSA as a national regulator for the higher education sector and commended the Government on the extensive consultation process it undertook to develop the legislation.

The Government welcomed the release of the report and has accepted all of the Committee’s recommendations. A copy of the Minister’s media release is available at http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Evans/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_110513_084853.aspx. In particular, the Government will amend the primary Bill to include provisions recognising that universities have the authority to self-accredit courses of study, consistent with the Committee’s recommendation.

The Bill will also be amended to reduce the statutory maximum timeframe for TEQSA to make a decision regarding a provider’s application for registration or accreditation for a course of study from 24 months to 18 months.

The Government will seek passage of the final Bills through Parliament in the winter sittings.
EDUCATION SERVICES FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS (ESOS) FUNCTIONS TRANSITION TO TEQSA

The transition of ESOS functions for higher education providers to TEQSA is scheduled to occur in January 2012. This will be achieved by the passage of the TEQSA legislation which will amend the ESOS Act to specify that TEQSA is the designated authority for registered higher education providers under the TEQSA Bill. Discussion with relevant stakeholders on the transition arrangements have commenced.

Recent amendments to the ESOS Act will allow the Minister to determine:

- who a provider’s designated authority will be if they deliver English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) and foundation programs
- standards for the registration of such courses under the ESOS Act as legislative instruments. These standards will assist in establishing national consistency in ELICOS and Foundation program delivery.

DEVELOPMENT OF TEQSA’S STANDARDS FRAMEWORK

DEEWR has been actively engaged with the higher education sector in the development of the Provider Standards. Consultation on the first draft of the Provider Standards took place in March and April 2010, and the many constructive comments received assisted in the development of a second draft. The second draft of the Provider Standards was released to stakeholders for comment in November 2010. As part of the consultation process, a stakeholder workshop was held in Melbourne on 7 February 2011. Discussion on the day was robust and valuable and, along with written submissions received, assisted the development of the next draft.

Stakeholders are now invited to submit comments on the third draft of the Provider Standards, which is available at the TEQSA website, by Thursday 2 June 2011.

A preliminary discussion paper on issues relating to Teaching and Learning standards which builds on conversations which have been held with sector experts in teaching and learning, reviews international good practice and discusses the various projects which the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) has funded is being developed and will be released for consultation with the sector by July 2011.

TRANSITION UPDATE

Preparation for the transfer of the Australian Universities Quality Agency’s (AUQA’s) functions to TEQSA is well underway, as are arrangements for AUQA staff transition options. Planning for the continuation of the cycle 2 university audit schedule is progressing well, as are arrangements for the migration of information held by AUQA.

The most recent round of bilateral discussions with states and territories took place during March to early May, and discussions remain robust and productive with all Government Accreditation Authorities (GAAs). Discussions in the upcoming period will prioritise determining each state and territory regulatory case load for transition, including pending decisions and issues of continuity. The Department is also continuing to work closely with the states and territories to finalise the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) for TEQSA with a revised draft having recently been circulated for comments and discussion. Negotiations are progressing well and once agreed upon, the IGA will then go forward to Ministers for endorsement.

COMMUNICATION WITH HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS

In the past three months, Ian Hawke has held Provider Information Sessions in six capital cities to update providers and key stakeholders on expected timelines and progress of TEQSA including transition arrangements for providers to the national regulator. These sessions were well attended and well-received by approximately 330 people representing over 140 higher education providers as well as state government representatives, higher education committees and peak bodies. Arrangements are underway for Provider Information Sessions to be conducted for providers and stakeholders in the remaining two capital city locations.
RECRUITMENT OF TEQSA’S SENIOR APPOINTMENTS

Advertisements to recruit for TEQSA’s Chief Commissioner, two full time Commissioners, two part time Commissioners and the Chair of the Higher Education Standards Panel will appear in all major Australian newspapers on the weekend commencing Friday 20 May 2011.

For a candidate information pack and position description email Michael Holdway at teqsa@talentpartnersintl.com. Enquires can be directed to Michael Holdway at Talent Partners on +61 3 9918 0977. Applications close at 5pm on Sunday 12 June 2011.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

International interest in TEQSA continues to be considerable and provides the opportunity for important dialogue about quality assurance approaches across borders. On April 6 2011, Mr Hawke presented to a global audience in Madrid at the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) conference. Mr Hawke presented on the topic: A new approach to QA in Australia: establishing TEQSA under the Conference theme ‘Effective QA Processes for diversity, development and sustainability’. Mr Hawke’s paper was very well received and a copy is available on the TEQSA website.

Also in April 2011, Professor Bradley travelled to Brussels to present at the 3rd Annual Symposium on University Rankings and Quality Assurance in Europe 2011. She also traveled to the UK and met with the Quality Assurance Agency, the Higher Education Funding Council for England, Higher Education Academy, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and other higher education regulation experts. Professor Bradley also met with her international counterparts for higher education reform - Lord Browne of Madingley who led the UK Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance, and Colin Hunt who prepared the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 in Ireland.

The meetings and Symposium provided a unique opportunity for Professor Bradley and the TEQSA Taskforce to draw on international experience in grappling with common issues for higher education regulation and quality assurance in a globally competitive market and increasingly user driven and transparent operating environment. The information shared and lessons learned will intelligently inform the development of TEQSA’s regulatory approach and standards framework in the new demand driven system for Australian higher education.

Professor Bradley and Mr Hawke are also maintaining an active presence on the Australian conference circuit to keep the higher education sector informed about developments. Recent events include presentations at the Interconnected Tertiary Education Conference, 9th Annual Higher Education Summit and the National Associate Deans’ Conference.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit www.deewr.gov.au/teqsa for further information about the progress of TEQSA. Copies of the Sector Update are now available to view and download from the website.

If you have any comments or questions, please direct them to www.deewr.gov.au/teqsa.