



Sector update: Engaging an independent expert to undertake a review

This document gives providers guidance on planning and conducting independent expert reviews.

Why undertake a review?

- An independent review can be an effective way for a provider to check the effectiveness of its institutional quality assurance processes.
- Independent reviews can help assure providers that their institutional policies, procedures and practice remain current and aligned with contemporary developments.
- Opportunities for continuous improvement can be identified. A provider can reflect on the recommendations made and identify and implement improvements, both of which are critical elements of a provider's self-assurance and quality improvement process.
- Independent review provides an opportunity to engage with expertise not available internally and draw on additional specialised expertise.
- Incorporating independent expert advice into business-as-usual processes delivers the best value to providers as a means of supporting effective institutional quality assurance.
- Engaging independent expert advice should be seen as an opportunity to contribute to self-assurance and the continuous improvement of the organisation, rather than a method to meet TEQSA or other requirements.

Considerations when planning a review

Providers may refer to [TEQSA's guidance on the factors for consideration relating to suitable independence and expertise](#). Providers may also choose to consult TEQSA's list of [external experts](#).

Timing

- Should a provider wish to use evidence of independent expert review to demonstrate its focus on self-assurance and continuous improvement, planning well in advance of a regulatory process will allow time to demonstrate implementation of actions and improvements.

Scope

- A provider may choose to undertake a comprehensive periodic review, or a targeted review focused on specific standards.
- Providers may include issues identified through previous reviews, including those identified by TEQSA or other regulatory processes, material changes that may have occurred (such as a move to online learning), input from key stakeholders including students and professional accrediting bodies.
- The templates TEQSA uses to scope reviews when engaging experts are available from your case manager. These are provided as guidance only.



Consideration of independent expert reports

- Has the independent reviewer made any suggestions or observations, including identifying specific focus areas for the future? How will these be considered and addressed?
- Has the review process identified any gaps in terms of evidence that was not readily available? How can this be addressed in the future?
- Does the report provide enough information, or would it be beneficial to meet with the reviewer to discuss the findings in more detail?
- What has been learned from undertaking this review and what could be done differently in the future to improve the process and the outcome?
- If an expert has suggested changes or improvements, could the expert be engaged to undertake a secondary review to assess how successfully those changes have been implemented?
- If risk areas have been identified, how have the issues of non-compliance occurred? What steps can be taken to ensure the non-compliance is rectified and monitored to ensure risks are appropriately managed in the future?

What does TEQSA look for?

When a provider has submitted evidence of an independent review for consideration in a regulatory process, TEQSA will consider:

- The finalised review complete with terms of reference, review reports and the provider's response; including meaningful and detailed actions taken to address recommendations
- Evidence that the relevant committees/bodies have considered the recommendations of the experts
- Evidence that the Governing Body has considered any additional resourcing that might be required to address issues identified by the external experts.

Successful independent reviews can also have additional benefits. For example an independent Course Review that is:

- well-scoped
- conducted by a suitable independent reviewer
- clearly demonstrates that findings or recommendations have been considered, acted upon and improvements documented, and
- shows Academic Board oversight,

will carry significant weight when TEQSA is considering the quality of academic governance in a provider.

This could reduce assessment timeframes in some circumstances as, depending on the suitability of the experts engaged, the findings of the review, and how the provider has actioned improvements, TEQSA may elect not to engage its own independent expert to undertake a review.