



Australian Government

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

Higher Education Provider Roundtable Report

DUBAI, Sheraton Mall of the Emirates – 8 November 2018

TEQSA

Overview

The Higher Education Provider Roundtable was convened as an opportunity for TEQSA to receive feedback directly from Australian providers operating in Dubai. It also provided an opportunity to include the in-country quality assurance body, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in the discussions.

Invitations were sent to all Australian providers operating in Dubai and eight representatives from five providers participated in this roundtable. TEQSA participants were Prof Nick Saunders, Chief Commissioner, Dr Karen Treloar, Director Engagement and Felicity Gianatti, International and Industry Professional Bodies Manager.

The roundtable included an update from Prof Nick Saunders on TEQSA's recent activities, changes in budget position and recruitment, key data from the Assessment Insights Report and next steps in regards to streamlining processes with Professional Accreditation Bodies.

Dr Warren Fox, KHDA, provided an overview of the KHDA and the quality assurance of branch campuses operating in economic free zones in Dubai. He also provided a background on the Quality Beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG) which was established to build cooperation and a level of trust amongst the quality assurance agencies from the major sending and receiving countries of higher education students.

Participants used this opportunity to provide feedback about some of the regulatory challenges of operating in Dubai, particularly around the lack of recognition by the Commission for Academic Accreditation of the Ministry of Education, UAE (CAA) of KHDA registered programs and how this impacts on the recognition of awards outside of Dubai. Discussions were also had about sharing data between the KHDA and TEQSA to reduce burden on providers and collaborating on activities to gain an overall sense of the student experience for those who are studying an Australian degree in Dubai.

Overall, there was strong support from participants for having the opportunity to meet with both regulators and also with each other, to explore options for greater cross-campus collaboration.

Main themes discussed

Lack of recognition of qualifications by CAA

Participants discussed the challenges of operating in Dubai where there are two ways in which the quality of higher education is assured. Those providers operating in the Free Zones are given academic authorisation by KHDA, which operates a validation model to ensure that programmes delivered in Dubai are equivalent to that in the home jurisdiction. For these institutions, licensing and accreditation by the federal Ministry of Education through the CAA is voluntary.

However, examples were given of students who had completed a KHDA registered qualification and not had their qualification recognised elsewhere in the UAE, the Gulf or in one case, in Canada without the accreditation of CAA. The KHDA model views qualifications as awarded by the home campus regardless of where the student has studied, but this is not always accepted by other jurisdictions. This has a significant impact on student mobility, employability and continued education elsewhere in the world.

Issues with CAA accreditation extends also to joint credit arrangements and staff moving across institutions.

KHDA advised that with the recent change of leadership within the CAA, communication has increased between the two organisations to try to resolve this issue of recognition. Participants suggested that the Australian Government needs to be involved to bring forward these concerns.

Alignment of Qualifications Frameworks

One participant indicated the importance of the alignment of the AQF with the Qualifications Framework of the Emirates. Participants were encouraged to provide a submission, via their Australian campus, to the current review of the AQF to ensure that any implications for international branch campuses are taken into consideration.

Data sharing

Participants indicated a need to explore options for greater sharing of data between TEQSA (and/or Department of Education and Training) and KHDA to reduce the burden on those providers already submitting data to HEIMS.

One participant raised a concern that the context of the provider and its branch campuses needs to be taken into account, specifically in relation to financial data, when developing the risk assessments. It was advised that TEQSA takes a holistic view of the financial standing of the entity rather than focussing on the financial standing of individual campuses.

Branch campus preparation for renewal of registration applications

Participants discussed how branch campuses can prepare for renewal of registration applications. Depending on the scope, determined through a conversation with the Case Team, TEQSA will be looking for evidence to support: effective management of the offshore operation; the equivalency of the student experience; the systems in place to be able to compare cohorts of students in different locations; appropriate action being taken by the Academic Board as required.

A conversation will also be had with the in-country quality assurance body.

Student engagement activities

The KHDA provided an overview of a recent project, undertaken in collaboration with the QAA, UK and the CPE/SkillsFuture Singapore, to gain an understanding of the student experience for those studying at UK institutions in Dubai. The project involved a TNE student survey and focus groups, focussed on experiences of resources, learning and teaching processes and the students' feelings of connection to the UK home campus. This process was repeated for students at UK institutions in Singapore.

The results indicated that while Dubai students felt a strong affiliation with the UK campuses and thought this was very important, the students in Singapore were more interested in the local provider. This may reflect that in Singapore, students were usually studying through a partnership arrangement and not at a branch campus of the UK university.

(A full report about this project, [A Case Study in Cross-border Cooperation in Quality Assurance](#) is available via the QAA website) There was support from participants to explore options for using this model to gain insight and feedback from Australian TNE students, which could be shared and discussed as a group. Conscious of causing 'survey fatigue' it was suggested that the KHDA's annual student satisfaction survey, or another existing mechanism, might be able to be used, followed by face-to-face focus groups.

Engagement with providers to address sexual assault and sexual harassment on campus

Participants indicated that this is something they are addressing, however the cultural context of the branch campus needs to be taken into account. Some participants raised concerns about Dubai law and the implications for people who may be involved in a these types of matters and how this may influence the implementation of policies and procedures and any material change notifications to TEQSA. It was advised that the Australian provider should discuss matters such as this with the Case Team to ensure that information is being considered in the correct local context.

Next steps

- TEQSA will explore avenues of communication with the CAA to open a conversation about the recognition of KHDA registered qualifications. This will be done in collaboration and consultation with the KHDA and providers.
- TEQSA and KHDA will continue to explore options for TNE student engagement activities and consult with providers to implement this (anticipated in 2019 or 2020).
- TEQSA and KHDA will work together to arrange meetings of the Australian providers operating in Dubai more regularly as this forum is an opportunity to discuss common issues and opportunities for cross-campus collaboration.