Australian Government

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

TEQSA and Professional Accreditation Bodies Forum

Melbourne – 14 December 2018

TEQSA

Overview

The Professional Accreditation Bodies Forum was convened on 14 December 2018 as an opportunity for TEQSA to receive feedback directly from professional accrediting bodies about the ways in which we can work together to effectively reduce duplication and streamline accreditation processes. It also responded to the advice of the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) which recommended closer collaboration between TEQSA and the professional accreditation bodies.

Over the past five years, TEQSA has entered into partnerships with 40 departments, agencies, peak bodies and professional accreditation bodies. Invitations to this forum were extended to 31 professional accreditation bodies with whom TEQSA has signed, or is in negotiations with to sign, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Approximately 50 representatives participated in the forum, representing the financial advice, teaching, health, and engineering sectors, amongst others.

The event included an update from Mr Anthony McClaran, Chief Executive Officer of TEQSA, including the intersection between professional accreditation and the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (Higher Education Standards Framework 2015), the principles that guide TEQSA's engagement with professional accreditation bodies and what we have learnt through interaction and pilot projects with professional accreditation partners thus far.

Mr Steve Erskine, Australian Government Department of Education and Training, gave an update on the actions arising from advice provided by the HESP to the then Minister for Education and Training in early 2018.

Dr Mark Brimble, Financial Adviser Standards and Ethics Authority (FASEA), Ms Phoebe Haywood, Queensland College of Teachers (QCT), and Ms Pauline Tang, The International Centre of Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality Education (THE-ICE), were invited to present case studies of different streamlined regulation and examples of working with TEQSA. Participants were encouraged to ask questions of the presenters but also to explore how these models could be transferred and used across different professions.

Presentations from the forum are available via the [presentations page on the TEQSA website](#).

Participants conducted small group discussions focussing on the following questions:

- How does TEQSA work more effectively with professional accreditation bodies in the future?

- What further support do professional accreditation bodies need to develop risk based approaches to regulation?

- How can we systematise greater information sharing between TEQSA and professional accreditation bodies?

Representatives from each group reported back as part of the final plenary session, facilitated by Ms Narelle Mills, Australian Dental Council (ADC), and feedback from this session will inform the development of a shared action plan in 2019.

Approximately 77 per cent of post-event survey respondents rated the forum as very good or excellent, and overall there was strong support for TEQSA to host more forums for professional accreditation bodies and continue to build relationships and discuss ways to further streamline accreditation in the future.

Major themes discussed

TEQSA and professional accreditation bodies working more effectively together

Most participants agreed that a greater understanding of each other's responsibilities, processes, and principles for decision making would enhance the relationship between TEQSA and the professional accreditation bodies. It was suggested that both TEQSA and the professional accreditation bodies need to explore and determine what it is that each would require in order to be satisfied with, and confidently rely on, the findings, analysis and decisions made by the other party.

There was strong support for TEQSA to hold more forums, either open to all professional accreditation bodies or targeted to those operating in similar fields. It was suggested that forums could also be thematic and used as a way to consult and workshop ideas with stakeholders. TEQSA could also be invited to participate in meetings and events hosted by the professional accreditation bodies and their members to assist in the development of a shared understanding and mutual respect and recognition. One participant suggested moving to a culture of shared terminology where possible to also assist with this process.

In acknowledgement that some professional accreditation bodies are currently working more closely with TEQSA than others, many participants agreed that the MoUs should be examined to determine the level each is operating at, as well as where these could be expanded on to increase and formalise information sharing across the board. Some participants suggested an examination of the data currently collected and held by both parties to see where there are commonalities, particularly at the course level, to make information sharing more relevant and effective.

Other suggestions included: developing a culture that normalised proactive and regular information sharing between both parties; being more transparent and making more information available in the public domain; building relationships and encouraging contact at an operational level; working together to build capacity within providers; supporting training opportunities for professional accreditation body staff at TEQSA; and considering nuanced approaches to working together, in acknowledgment of the varying levels of operational maturity and requirements of the professional accreditation bodies.

The majority of participants were in agreement to work together more collaboratively with an aim of developing a model of partnership between the professional accreditation bodies and the regulator.

Navigating variations in standards and requirements

Participants acknowledged the challenges of streamlining accreditation activities considering the different requirements, standards and expectations of organisations, and the complexity of having to adhere to state and/or federal requirements.

One suggestion was to determine the requirements that are different due to legislation, as opposed to differences in approaches that are embedded in processes and the culture of the organisation or the industry. Once identified, how can TEQSA and the professional accreditation bodies work together to support the changes that might be required to achieve a more streamlined approach?

One participant raised the need to map differences between bodies by looking at the drivers. Are the standards, processes or requirements driven by public concern and confidence, student interests, standards-based regulation, or an improvement and enhancement approach?

One participant raised the need for support for those professional accreditation bodies seeking recognition or operating in the international space.

Reducing duplication

There was strong support from participants to work together to reduce duplication, and in turn reduce burden for higher education providers. Some participants suggested mapping the evidence requirements of TEQSA and the professional accreditation bodies to identify the commonalities and opportunities where the same evidence may be able to be used for both processes. There may also be an opportunity to develop a template for this which meets both purposes and makes submitting evidence more streamlined for the provider.

Raised during one of the presentations, there was some support amongst participants to explore the possibility of a shared information portal, which would allow different organisations to access the same data and evidence submitted once by the higher education provider.

Participants also discussed sharing external experts, who could submit a report for use by both TEQSA and the professional accreditation bodies. It was suggested that staff from the professional accreditation bodies could also be trained in a similar way to TEQSA staff, enhancing a shared understanding and capacity, as well as building trust across the organisations.

Some concerns were raised that joint accreditation processes, when trying to meet different requirements, can actually be more burdensome and resource-intensive. However, models of conducting parallel assessments may be more effective.

Risk-based approach

Participants discussed adopting a risk-based approach to professional accreditation, and there was strong support to learn more about how this is implemented at TEQSA and the philosophy and principles behind decision making. Having a more thorough understanding and greater confidence in TEQSA's approach could lead to professional accreditation bodies adopting TEQSA's risk ratings of providers, and reducing the scope of assessment for low risk providers.

One participant suggested that, for mature and established providers and courses, it was not necessary to assess all elements during every cycle. Instead, efforts could be concentrated on identifying any changes since the last cycle and assessing how these have been managed and implemented. It was noted that an ability to adopt this approach might also depend on the maturity of the professional accreditation body as well as the provider.

Other suggestions included: identifying opportunities for professional accreditation bodies to provide more input into TEQSA risk assessments; exploring further how each organisation defines 'risk' to find commonalities; looking at models adopted in other jurisdictions; and further consideration by TEQSA about implementing greater transparency of risk thresholds.

Next Steps

The following questions, based on the feedback received from this forum, will be considered as part of TEQSA's forward planning.

1. How are our MoUs currently operating and how can these be improved? Do our MoUs need to be reviewed to be more prescriptive and specific about the type of information being shared and a formal process for doing so?

2. What systems can be put in place to enhance relationships and create more of a partnership approach between TEQSA and professional accreditation bodies? How might a broad approach to working with professional accreditation bodies need to be nuanced for specific professional accreditation bodies if there are different requirements to overcome?

3. How can TEQSA consider the sharing of external experts with professional accreditation bodies as part of the current Expert Review Project?

4. What further forums can TEQSA lead to continue the conversations? What training or workshops could be offered to enhance understanding of TEQSA's risk based approach, quality assurance, information and data collection and analysis, or the Higher Education Standards Framework 2015? Participants agreed to be a sounding board for future consultation about working together, and agreed to help bring other bodies not present at this event, into the conversation. How can TEQSA facilitate greater communication and collaboration in this regard across the sector?