TEQSA engagement framework

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TEQSA

Contents

Stakeholder engagement and TEQSA

Stakeholder engagement and participation are vital to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). As Australia's national quality assurance and regulatory agency for higher education, our stakeholders are highly diverse and our approach to engagement recognises and supports this diversity.

TEQSA seeks to engage with our stakeholders at all levels, using open communication, reflecting on feedback and taking action where appropriate.

Engagement with our stakeholders provides us with a greater understanding of the key issues in the higher education sector and helps to build stakeholder capacity to meet regulatory requirements.

This Framework is underpinned by a Group Business Plan, which includes a focus on activities and performance indicators of success. As such this is a one-year framework which is updated annually.

Finally, TEQSA acknowledges that this framework is modelled on the Australian Government, Department of Health and Human Services, Stakeholder Engagement Framework.

Purpose of the framework

The TEQSA Engagement Framework outlines the models for engagement, our key actions, our capability improvement agenda, our approach to risk oversight and management, and our performance framework, drawing each back to our strategic priorities:

- effective oversight of the quality and reputation of Australian higher education
- efficient, effective, responsive, risk-based quality assurance and regulatory activities
- constructive and collaborative relationships with governments, higher education providers, students and other stakeholders
- effective internal quality assurance by providers.

The framework sets out a strategic approach to stakeholder engagement that includes:

- principles to guide our engagement approach
- a five-step model for conducting engagement activities
- a matrix to support tailoring the level of engagement to the task, recognising that tools and strategies must be fit-for-purpose, and appropriate to the issues on which we are seeking to engage
- challenges to consider
- strategies for success.

Principles for engagement

TEQSA has five key principles to guide stakeholder engagement activities. The principles set the standards to which we aspire in building consistent, open and respectful working relationships. The principles are consistent with stakeholder engagement standards and practices across the public and private sectors, locally and internationally.

Purposeful

We begin every engagement with a clear understanding of what we want to achieve

- While our engagement is driven by our strategic priorities, we must be aware of our stakeholders' objectives and the environment in which they operate to ensure that we conduct focused and meaningful engagement.
- By planning our communication and managing expectations, we aim to enhance the understanding of stakeholders participating in the process.

Collaborative consultation

We work with our stakeholders in partnership

- We collaborate with our stakeholders on issues of common interest and listen to their feedback.
- We consult stakeholders about our approach to regulation and quality assurance using a variety of communication channels.

Informative and engaged

We provide our stakeholders with the information they need to participate

- We inform providers of their obligations using guidance notes, the TEQSA website, newsletters, roundtables, workshops, conferences and media releases.

Transparent

We are open and honest in our engagement

- We provide information so stakeholders can participate in a meaningful way that will foster a culture of sharing ideas.
- We clearly identify and explain the engagement process, the role of stakeholders in the engagement process, and communicate how their input will inform our actions.

Respectful

We acknowledge and respect the expertise, perspective and needs of stakeholders

- We understand that engagement is a two-way process. We actively listen to our stakeholders and respect their expertise.

Process for engagement

Inclusive participation

Inclusive participation is a fundamental element of good stakeholder engagement and a priority for TEQSA. The higher education community is diverse and includes people of different backgrounds, needs, values and aspirations. It is important that we encourage and support a diverse range of stakeholder input to properly reflect the high education community.

It is important not only to engage with our prominent stakeholders, but to encourage and seek participation from stakeholders who may not be frequently heard or who may be harder to reach.

Careful consideration should be given to:

- the needs and capacities of our stakeholders
- engagement approaches that are responsive to diverse needs, communication preferences and that encourage and facilitate meaningful participation and contribution from stakeholders
- barriers to stakeholder involvement and strategies to address them
- resources, mentoring or training that may be required to enable people to participate
- using a variety of communication methods to engage harder to reach groups
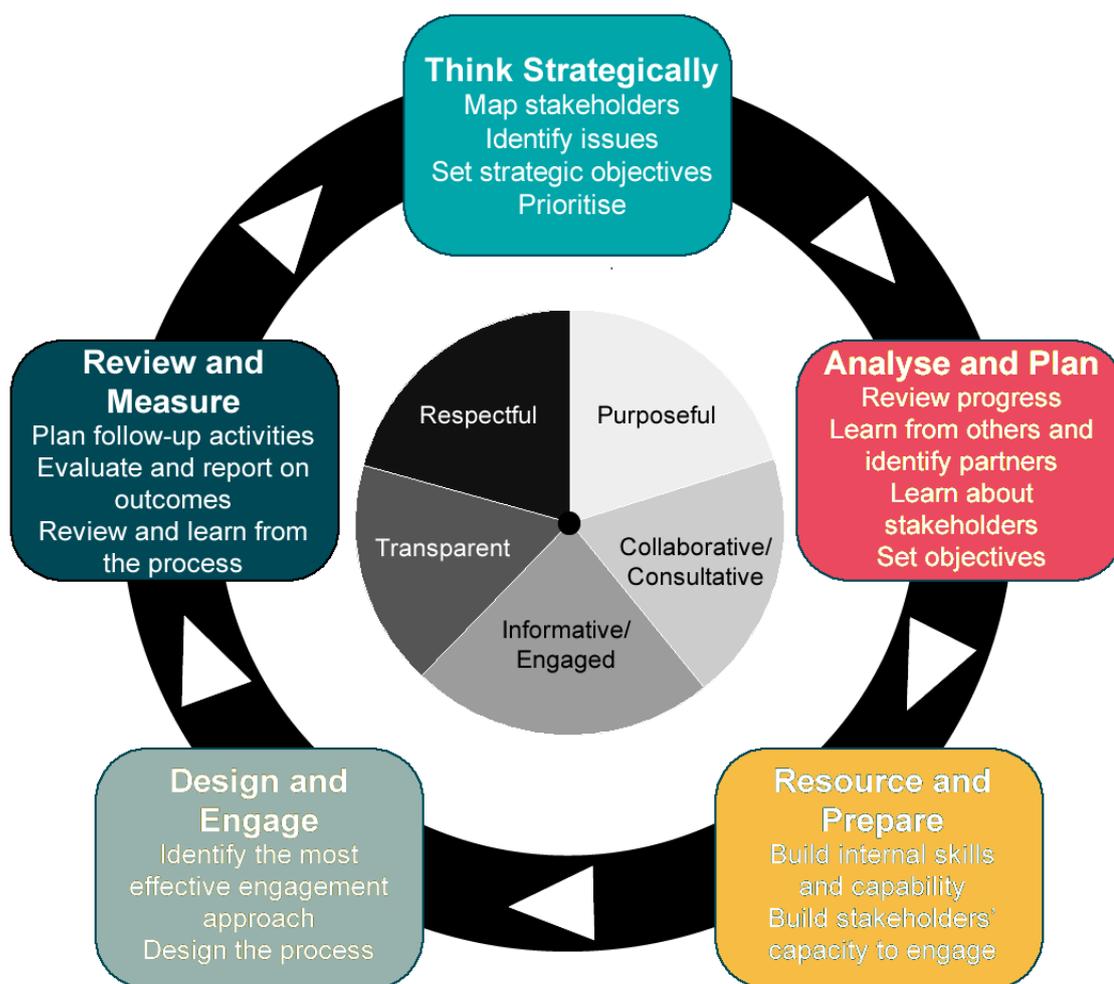
Understand the engagement history

Many stakeholders and stakeholder groups will already have a history of engagement with TEQSA. This history will inform how our engagement process progresses and how stakeholders engage with TEQSA. It is important to understand the historical context that the engagement process is entering into and how it might change or reinforce existing relationships.

Five-step stakeholder engagement model

TEQSA's model for stakeholder engagement has been adapted from the international standard developed by the Institute of Social and Ethical AccountAbility (2005).

The five-step process is structured to support thorough planning, preparation, action and evaluation of every engagement activity. The process is a dynamic and ongoing cycle, which supports a comprehensive approach to engagement and will, over time, build an evidence-based platform for continuous improvement.

Figure 1.   Five-step stakeholder engagement model

Levels of engagement

We engage with our stakeholders at all levels and select the most appropriate method of engagement and the relevant tools and techniques according to the situation, time, skills available and resources. We understand the importance of continuously reviewing our various methods of engagement to ensure they are effective.

The following table provides guidance on the various levels of engagement[1] and our commitment to stakeholders:

Table 1.   Levels of engagement

Inform	Consult	Engage	Collaborate
To inform or educate stakeholders in one way communication, there is no invitation to respond	To gain information and feedback from stakeholders to inform decisions. Limited two-way communication – ask questions, stakeholder provides answers	To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that issues and concerns are understood and considered. Two way or multi-way communication	To partner with stakeholder and/or stakeholder groups for the development of mutually agreed solutions and joint plan of action. Two way/multi-way communication. Stakeholders work together to take action
We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to your concerns, consider your insights, and provide feedback on our decisions	We will work with you and listen to your concerns and issues and provide feedback on how input influenced the outcome	We will work together and, where appropriate, incorporate your advice and recommendations into the outcomes to the maximum extent possible

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[1] Adapted from the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum (2007)

The table below provides an outline of suggested ways in which to engage stakeholders according to each level of engagement.

Table 2.   Methods of engagement

Inform	Consult	Engage	Collaborate
Fact sheets and the TEQSA website	One-on-one meetings	Multi-stakeholder forum	Joint projects
Newsletters	Roundtable	Advisory panel	Multi-stakeholder initiatives
Corporate documents(annual reports, strategic plans)	Workshops	Annual conference	
Speeches, conference and	Feedback	Workshop	
public presentations		Roundtables	
Media releases		Social media	
Social media		Consultative committees	

The level of method of engagement will be determined by the purpose of the engagement, our role and responsibilities, and the issue or issues being considered.

Feedback

It is important that we provide meaningful feedback to our stakeholders about how their input and feedback has been used. Reporting back on the stakeholder engagement process will ensure that stakeholders feel that their contributions have made a difference to the outcome of our engagement process. This in turn encourages stakeholders to participate in the future.

All significant stakeholder engagement processes should report back to stakeholders on how they have contributed to the outcomes of the engagement process. Reporting back

can be done by providing participants with written feedback, by holding feedback sessions or forums or by using digital communication.

What can inhibit effective engagement?

Barriers to effective engagement, as set out by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC)[2] include:

Potential issue	Method for mitigation
Unclear purpose	If the purpose of the engagement is poorly defined, all the activities that follow will be affected, including the identification of stakeholders, determining the methods to be used, and managing stakeholder expectations. You may need to involve stakeholders in defining the purpose of the engagement
Differing capacity of stakeholders	Stakeholders can sometimes have different levels of skills and experience in engaging with government. This can affect their ability to fully participate in an initiative, as well as the quality of the information they provide. You may need to work with some stakeholders to build their capacity to contribute, or offer modified or different models of engagement.
Insufficient skills in the team	Effective stakeholder engagement requires a specific skill set. The absence of the right skills can hinder collaboration across organisational boundaries and make it hard to identify issues and opportunities. This can result in damaged relationships between government and stakeholders, and poor quality advice and information. During the planning stages, identify skills available and skills required at subsequent stages. Explore options to develop skills and/or engage external expertise.
Unfocused dialogue	Stakeholder engagement can cover a range of issues that are important to stakeholders but may be less so to the initiative. If this happens, it can distract from obtaining relevant input. The engagement plan should be clear on what issues are relevant and how to manage and respond to any ad hoc issues that are raised. Responding to ad hoc issues thoughtfully is important. For example, there may be another area in the department where those issues could be considered further
Failure to review and evaluate	Without robust review and evaluation it is difficult to know if the approach is working and whether changes are needed.

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[2] Cabinet Implementation Toolkit (PMC, 2013)

Potential issue	Method for mitigation
	Failure to review and evaluate also reduces the ability to learn from and improve engagement. The engagement plan should include review points throughout the policy design and implementation, with flexibility to adjust the approach if needed.

2019 areas of focus

In 2019, TEQSA will focus on the following areas:
- enhancing how TEQSA engages and manages its experts workforce
- increasing TEQSA's engagement with students
- increasing TEQSA's engagement with independent providers
- holding Quality Enhancement Fora on subjects such as:
  - sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Australian higher education sector
  - academic integrity
  - professional accreditation
- continuing to improve communication via TEQSA's website and intranet
- growing TEQSA's profile outside of traditional higher education media and continue to increase our social media presence
- supporting and enhancing international relationships.

Strategies for success

- commit to action
- manage time and resources
- map your stakeholders and get the right stakeholders to the table
- agree on the rules of engagement
- plan the engagement and manage expectations
- ensure a coherent approach across the Agency
- use a mixed or fit-for-purpose approach
- use consistent and appropriate messages
- act with transparency and accountability
- learn from others
- use the information you collect
- be focussed and flexible
- listen and be respectful.

Appendix 1 Stakeholder Groups

Group	Stakeholders
Education providers	- Universities - TAFEs - Independent providers - Experts - Academics
Students	- Australian Council of Higher Education and Training (ACPET) student representatives - Australian Queer Students' Network (AQSN) - Council of International Students Australia (CISA) - Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) - Independent Higher Education Australia (IHEA) Student Representatives - National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduates Association (NATSIPA) - National Union of Students - TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) student representatives - Union of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Students (UATSIS)
Government and regulatory agencies	- Department of Education and Training - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) - Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade)
Industry	Industry Professional Accreditation Bodies
Peak bodies and professional associations	- Universities Australia (UA) - Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) - Independent Higher Education Australia (IHEA) - TAFE Directors Australia (TDA)

	- English Australia (EA) - International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) - National ELT Accreditation Scheme (NEAS) - Australian Technology Network (ATN) - Group of Eight (G8) - Innovative Research Universities (IRU) - Regional Universities Network (RUN)

References

AccountAbility, 2005, AA1000SE *Stakeholder Engagement Practitioner's Perspectives*.

Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), 2014, *Better Practice Guide, Public Sector Governance: Strengthening performance through good governance*.

Department of Health and Human Services, 2018, *Stakeholder Engagement Framework*.

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC), 2013, *Cabinet Implementation Toolkit*.

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), 2007, *IAP2 public participation spectrum.*