ASQA Stakeholder Liaison Group Communiqué

The inaugural meeting of the ASQA Stakeholder Liaison Group (SLG) was held on 28 July 2020 via national videoconference.

The purpose of the SLG is to engage and consult with providers (including VET sector consultants) on ASQA's approach to engagement and education, and to identify and respond to key issues facing providers.

Introductions

The experience of SLG members has been summarised on the ASQA website. The Chair emphasised how the professional skills, experience and diversity of members will greatly assist the work of the SLG and its integral role in shaping the expansion of ASQA's education and guidance function.

ASQA reform agenda: working together for better regulation

Members discussed ASQA's long-term reform program and the actions ASQA has under way to commence its implementation of the recommendations of the Rapid Review of ASQA's regulatory practices and processes, released in April 2020, which commits ASQA to:

- strengthen its engagement and education programs
- clarify its role and regulatory approach
- build a common understanding of self-assurance and excellence in outcomes
- align its practices and governance accordingly
- provide more considered and meaningful reporting on provider performance
- undertake appropriate and proportionate regulatory action as required.

The Chair noted that some work is being implemented in a staged approach with the first stage to be completed by the end of 2020, while other reforms will have a longer timeline.

Improvements to ASQA's audit practices

Members discussed the impending changes to ASQA's audit practices.

ASQA is making improvements to its audit practices to better align with the principles of best practice regulation. These include changes to how ASQA deals with minor deficiencies, improvements to audit reports, and creating opportunities for providers to respond to issues and concerns prior to ASQA making any findings of non-compliance. ASQA's revised audit approach also means that additional information and evidence will be requested from providers earlier in the audit process.

The transition to the new approach will start from August 2020 and providers can expect to experience these changes progressively over coming months. ASQA will continue to build on these improvements to make more substantial changes that will be developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders across the sector.

Members sought further information on a range of matters, including the timing of upfront requests for information and documentary evidence; evidence sampling approaches; the role of ASQA auditors; and the importance of ASQA considering the totality of evidence gathered during an audit prior to making any findings of non-compliance.

Members spoke about the merits of providers moving away from a focus on meeting the minimum requirements of the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015*, to a more sustained self-assurance approach committed to consistently delivering on quality outcomes for students.

Building a shared understanding of self-assurance

As recommended in the Rapid Review, ASQA will be working with the sector to build a shared understanding of, and capability for, self-assurance as a foundation for future reform. This is a long-term process that must align with broader reforms undertaken as part of the VET reform roadmap.

ASQA is commencing its engagement with the sector by releasing a consultation paper and by hosting a webinar about self-assurance in the coming weeks.

Members agreed that it is important to define self-assurance, together with its challenges and opportunities. Feedback included that providers would be prepared to embrace self-assurance (but are unsure how to start) and that there will need to be an understanding of where self-assurance fits in the context of ASQA's regulatory role.

Members acknowledged that providers vary widely in their resources and abilities, so guidance and practical materials will be needed to promote understanding and adoption of self-assurance across the sector over the long term.

Members will continue to consider ideas on how ASQA can best engage on this issue.

Monitoring and analysis of provider risk and online learning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant disruption in the delivery of VET and ELICOS, in particular to the delivery of face-to-face classes, workplace training and assessment and a decline in the number of new international student enrolments.

Members discussed ASQA's approach to the strategic monitoring of risk among providers in the context of COVID-19 and noted that the strategy reflects a more transparent and dynamic approach to monitoring risk and supporting provider compliance. The strategy has focused on raising awareness of emerging risks by giving providers, students and other stakeholders more data and information, and to clearly articulate where regulatory scrutiny will apply to providers at higher risk of non-compliance. Members acknowledged the positive contribution of these activities, especially the practical support offered through webinars and other information in relation to the move to distance learning.

Members contributed their views on the challenges faced by providers transitioning to online learning in the context of the pandemic. Challenges that need to be balanced against the potential innovation in online learning include the requirements for work placements in training packages, improving the credibility and reputation of online learning and the need to preserve a quality experience for students. It was agreed that ASQA would consider the higher education sector's experience with maintaining academic integrity in online learning for some insights and continue to identify additional support that may be of value for providers.

Next meeting

This year the SLG will meet again in October and November.