



Australian Government

Australian Skills Quality Authority

CONSULTATION PAPER

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WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS EFFECTIVE SELF-ASSURANCE

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Introduction

In 2019, Skills Senior Officials were tasked with developing a VET reform roadmap to achieve a vision, shared by Australian governments, to position the sector as responsive, dynamic and trusted. The [draft reform roadmap](#) outlines a pathway for achieving high quality education, training, and assessment, acknowledging this is a responsibility shared between governments and the private sector, and requires a viable robust system of both public and private providers.

Consistent with the draft roadmap, the [Rapid Review of the Australian Skills Quality Authority's Regulatory Practices and Processes](#) recommended changes to ASQA's regulatory approach and practice in line with a focus on provider self-assurance. With a focus on those aspects of the *Standards for RTOs 2015* ('the Standards') that relate to self-assurance, ASQA wants to work with the sector to understand how we can support providers in building capability for self-assurance, through critical examination and continuous improvement of practices for sustained compliance, to produce quality outcomes for students, employers, and the community.

What is self-assurance?

Self-assurance is a regulatory approach used in various contexts in Australia and around the world. Notably, it is used in educational settings including early childhood, school, and vocational and higher education locally and internationally. The concept of self-assurance refers to the way providers manage their operations to ensure a focus on quality, continuous improvement, and ongoing compliance. Self-assurance requires providers have systems in place to critically examine their performance (compliance with the Standards) and outcomes (student outcomes), on an ongoing basis, to identify ways to continuously improve. Systems of self-assurance can work to manage risk, and to drive quality and improvements. Providers employing effective self-assurance systems demonstrate a genuine commitment and capability to delivering quality VET.

Self-assurance is not the same as self-regulation. Self-regulation often involves industry taking responsibility for regulation, with government having a limited role. The concept of self-assurance requires providers manage their business to ensure a focus on quality, continuous improvement and ongoing compliance with standards set by governments. The role of ASQA, as the regulator is to promote this culture, to monitor each provider's performance against the Standards, to identify any non-compliance and to support providers to return to compliance (or to take necessary sanctions action where this is not possible).

Why a move to self-assurance?

While ASQA's regulatory approach has not always specifically focused on provider self-assurance, the expectation for providers to quality assure their operations has always formed part of the VET regulatory framework – for example:

- Standard 2 of the Standards requires that '*the operations of the RTO are quality assured.*'
- The ELICOS Standards require registered providers to have 'management systems that are responsive to the needs of students, staff and stakeholders and the environment in which the provider operates', and which include 'a systematic and continuous improvement approach to managing its operations'.
- The *National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011* also explicitly states that one of the functions of ASQA is to 'promote, and encourage the continuous improvement of, an RTO's capacity to provide a VET course or part of a VET course'.

This means that applying a stronger focus on self-assurance will not increase regulatory burden for providers. Instead, this focus will encourage and promote good business practice, based on critical reflection and continuous improvement, to produce quality training outcomes.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to compliance with the Standards. Compliant practice needs to be considered relative to the context in which a provider operates. A self-assurance approach enables each provider to critically examine their practice, relative to their own circumstances, to understand their compliance with the Standards and the quality of education experienced by students. ASQA does not prescribe how to comply with the Standards, but instead focuses on testing providers' systems and processes for ensuring sustained compliance, continuous improvement, and quality outcomes for students. Together, the regulator and providers share responsibility for quality outcomes. These complementary roles are central to high performing education systems around the world and are at the heart of the move to self-assurance.

Working together to build effective self-assurance

Increasing the focus on self-assurance in VET requires a collective effort from governments, regulators, and providers. Governments are responsible for ensuring the VET framework is fit for purpose, with a greater emphasis on self-assurance in the Standards. ASQA, as the regulator, is responsible for promoting and supporting a culture of effective self-assurance, monitoring each provider's performance against the Standards, and supporting providers to return to compliance (or to apply sanctions where this is not possible). Providers are responsible for applying self-assurance measures as a core part of their business to maintain compliance with the Standards, and ensuring they are consistently delivering quality outcomes for students.

ASQA will take a staged approach to increasing our focus on effective provider self-assurance. **Initially**, ASQA will work with providers and key stakeholders to develop a shared understanding and build capability in self-assurance by:

- gathering and sharing existing examples of continuous improvement and self-assurance practices that support ongoing compliance with the Standards and ensure quality outcomes for students
- seeking feedback from the sector on how the current annual declaration on compliance could be improved to better promote and support a culture and practice of effective self-assurance
- using the information we gather to implement a revised declaration on compliance and to publish supporting guidance material in 2021.

In the **medium-term** (2021 onwards), providers will share with ASQA the processes they use to self-assure and improvements they have made to deliver quality training and assessment outcomes. ASQA will continue to work with the sector to develop new tools to build capability and support greater provider self-assurance.

Long-term (in 3 to 4 years' time):

- providers will have strong systems of self-assurance to identify (and fix) problems or issues before they are identified by ASQA
- providers will focus on performance, outcomes, and continuously improving their own practice (to drive improvements to training and assessment quality and outcomes for students and employers)
- students and employers will know what to look for in terms of quality (and how to seek quality from providers, thereby playing a role in driving quality)
- ASQA will take a risk-based approach that reduces regulatory oversight for providers who demonstrate effective self-assurance.

Have your say

ASQA is seeking input on our proposed approach to developing self-assurance capability and practice for providers. Your feedback will inform the design and implementation of initiatives that aim to build a culture of effective self-assurance in the sector.

Submitting your response

You can submit your response to this consultation paper by filling out our online submission form at: www.asqa.gov.au/form/have-your-say-self-assurance.

The consultation period will run from **Monday 3 August to Monday 31 August 2020**.

You will need to provide some basic details as part of the submission process and will then be prompted to enter your response to the following three question areas outlined below.

Short, medium and long-term outcomes

Our proposed short and medium-term actions aim to contribute to the longer-term outcome of effective provider self-assurance and ongoing improvement for the sector.

In order to increase the focus on effective self-assurance, what actions or outcomes do you think should be included in the short, medium and long-term?

Sharing examples of provider self-assurance

ASQA recognises that there are currently varying levels of self-assurance capability amongst providers. Some providers already embed effective self-assurance in their practices to maintain their compliance with the Standards and continuously improve the quality of outcomes for students.

Can you provide examples of how providers already employ effective self-assurance mechanisms, to help build the capability of the sector?

Revising the annual RTO declaration on compliance

Clause 8.4 of the Standards requires providers to submit an annual declaration on compliance with the Standards. The intent of this clause is for providers to self-assure by declaring that they have training and assessment strategies in place to ensure all current and prospective learners will be trained in accordance with the Standards.

In reality, the annual declaration on compliance is seen by many providers as a task (or checklist) to be completed for ASQA (a regulatory burden). Instead, it could be used by providers as an opportunity to meaningfully review quality systems, governance, and student outcomes, to ensure ongoing compliance with the Standards and highlight areas for improvement.

The RTO declaration on compliance will be substantially reviewed when revised standards are released. In the interim, ASQA would like to improve the declaration for use by providers in 2021.

For example:

- ASQA could amend the declaration to include a focus on a sector wide risk
- Providers could be asked to provide a summary of the processes they use to examine compliance and any improvements they plan to make to address deficiencies where identified
- ASQA could share examples of good practice with the sector to help providers improve their ability to self-assure.

**How could the annual RTO declaration be improved to build provider self-assurance capability?
Suggestions may include ways to critically reflect on practice or identifying other ways to improve.**