



RESPONSE TO THE FINDINGS OF THE 2013 ASQA SURVEY OF TRAINING PROVIDERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Background:

As the national regulator for the vocational education and English language training sector, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is committed to providing agile, responsive and risk-based regulation.

To measure this, ASQA conducts an annual survey to assess its performance against the key performance indicators (KPIs) set out in its Portfolio Budget Statement and its strategic and operational plans.

2013 Survey and results:

In 2011–12, ASQA invited around 130 stakeholders to provide feedback on its performance. In 2012–13, ASQA sought feedback on its performance from the 4017 training providers it regulated at the time of the survey as well as 198 key stakeholders using a web-based survey.

The survey was developed by ASQA in partnership with Australian Survey Research Pty Ltd (ASR). The survey was open for a period of three weeks in July 2013 with 2581 providers and 90 stakeholders completing the survey. ASQA was pleased with the number of responses it received from the survey, completion of which was not compulsory.

The results of the survey indicate that, generally, ASQA's stakeholders and the training providers it regulates were happy with ASQA's performance during 2012–13. Further the results of the survey indicate that ASQA is seen as an effective regulator. ASQA elicited positive responses in the majority of questions it asked. The range of mean scores—using a five-point scale—for the stakeholder survey was from 4.5 to 3.0, with 5 being excellent and 1 equalling very poor. Mean scores for the training provider survey ranged from 4.1 to 2.6.

Using the survey results to enhance ASQA:

As well as identifying what ASQA does well, the survey identifies areas where stakeholders and training providers think ASQA can improve. Two areas identified by survey respondents as requiring improvement include:

- the timeliness of ASQA's response to applications made,
- the way ASQA communicates and engages with training providers.



Timeliness of ASQA's response to applications made

Since commencing operations on 1 July 2011, ASQA has worked to decrease the time it takes to process applications from training providers with the finalisation rate of applications—that is, applications finalised as a per cent of total applications received—steadily improving. In the September 2011 quarter, 26.4 per cent of applications received were finalised in that quarter. By the September 2012 quarter the rate of finalisation had increased to 85.8 per cent and in the September quarter of 2013 the rate was 90.8 per cent.

As at 1 November 2013, the average time taken to process change of scope applications, which account for close to 85 per cent of the applications ASQA receives, was 5-6 weeks.

Applications to re-register an existing RTO and to establish new training providers do take longer, especially when an audit is required and non-compliance with the national standards is identified. For existing RTOs, the *National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act* states that a provider's registration continues while ASQA makes a decision on its application for re-registration.

There are a number of simple things that providers can do to minimise the time ASQA takes to process an application, including ensuring the application is:

- submitted via ASQAnet
- complete and includes all required information to enable ASQA to make a decision, and
- submitted with the correct fee payment.

The time taken to process an application may be longer than average if:


- a CRICOS application has been submitted with a VET application
- the applicant RTO's risk rating is high
- the applicant RTO has failed to pay its fees thereby delaying the commencement of processing the application
- the applicant RTO has any unresolved non-compliance actions or sanctions imposed that are relevant to the scope of the application.

The onus is firmly on training providers to ensure their applications meet each of the factors above.

ASQA is continuing to implement enhanced systems and processes to reduce the time it takes to process applications.

ASQA engagement with training providers

A number of survey respondents indicated that they would like to see a more tailored/personalised/case manager-type relationship between ASQA and training providers. Such a relationship would be similar to the relationship fostered by some former State-based regulators and the training providers operating in their jurisdiction. ASQA believes it is not feasible for it to foster such relationships with training providers. As a national body, ASQA regulates around 4000 vocational education and English language training providers. The resourcing implications of ASQA employing enough staff to enable it offer a meaningful case manager-type relationship with providers would be prohibitive.



Being a full cost recovery agency, these costs would have to be passed on to the training providers through increased fees and charges.

It is the responsibility of each provider to ensure that they are meeting the required national standards, while it is ASQA's job to check that providers are complying with those standards. ASQA does, however, recognise the need to provide further information that will assist training organisations in understanding their obligations and the qualifications framework. ASQA does this through its website, Info line, email enquiries service and RTO Information Sessions. ASQA acknowledges the need to continually improve the information to providers so they can be clearer about what is expected of them under the national standards. For example, ASQA's Info line has a quality assurance program and seeks to continually enhance the service it provides. Another major round of provider information workshops is also being planned for 2014.

Conclusion:

ASQA thanks those training providers and stakeholders who took the time to complete its 2013 Survey. In the interests of transparency, ASQA has already briefed the peak training provider organisations on the results of the survey and how the results will be used within the organisation. Similarly, ASQA has published the results of the survey on its website and in its annual report. ASQA intends to undertake another survey in mid-2014.