



Higher Education Standards Panel

Communique Number 1 – June 2012

Welcome from Emeritus Professor Alan Robson

Chair - Higher Education Standards Panel

Welcome to the inaugural communique from the Higher Education Standards Panel (Panel). The Panel was formally established on 10 January 2012 and has begun to develop its work plan. As part of its communication strategy, the Panel will be issuing communiqués to the sector from time to time to keep key stakeholders informed about the Panel's work.

Over the next few months, the Panel will also be seeking input on how it can best share information and engage efficiently with higher education stakeholders on the development of the standards that will underpin the quality of higher education for Australia.

The Panel

The *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011* (the *TEQSA Act*) established a Higher Education Standards Panel (Panel) to provide *independent* advice to the Commonwealth Minister for Tertiary Education and the Commonwealth Minister for Research on making and varying the standards for higher education that constitute the new Higher Education Standards Framework (Framework). This Framework is the foundation for TEQSA's standards-based regulation of *all* providers of higher education in Australia.

The inaugural membership of the Panel is:

- Emeritus Professor Alan Robson AM CitWA (Chair), former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Australia
- Professor Richard James, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Participation and Engagement) and Director of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne
- Ms Adrienne Nieuwenhuis, Director – Quality, Tertiary Education, Science and Research, South Australian Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology and Member, National Skills Standards Council
- Emeritus Professor David Siddle, former Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of Queensland
- Professor Joanne Wright, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice President: Academic, University of South Australia.

Responsibilities of the Panel

The responsibilities of the Panel are set out in the *TEQSA Act*.



Standards for Higher Education

The Higher Education Standards Framework is defined in the *TEQSA Act*. It currently consists of a set of 'Threshold Standards'. These include:

- Provider Registration Standards
- Provider Category Standards
- Provider Course Accreditation Standards
- Qualification Standards.

The Threshold Standards were developed in consultation with the sector prior to the establishment of TEQSA and the Panel. They are based in part on the former *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* and the *Australian Qualifications Framework*, adapted for regulatory purposes.

The Higher Education Standards Framework also makes provision for the development of other 'Non-Threshold' Standards including:

- Teaching and Learning Standards
- Research Standards
- Information Standards.

Ownership of the Standards

Higher Education Standards are Legislative Instruments made by the Commonwealth Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research in accordance with the *TEQSA Act*. Although the Standards are used by TEQSA, they are not 'TEQSA Standards'. Nor are they owned by the Panel.

Regulation against Standards

TEQSA's current regulatory work is based on the Threshold Standards. All higher education providers must meet and continue to meet the Threshold Standards in order to enter and remain within Australia's higher education system.

Review of the Threshold Standards

The Panel is required to commence a review of the current Threshold Standards within 12 months of the establishment of the Panel. The Panel has already turned its mind to this review, including considering the overall architecture of the Higher Education Standards Framework. Further details on the Panel's proposed approaches to its work will be provided in subsequent communiques, along with invitations for feedback from time to time.

Relationship between the Panel and TEQSA

TEQSA is required to provide resources to support the work of the Panel, but the Panel is otherwise independent of TEQSA, reporting directly to the Commonwealth Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research. The Panel is required to consult with TEQSA and mechanisms have been established to do so from time to time.



In relation to standards, the Panel is primarily concerned with advising the Commonwealth Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research on 'making' (and varying) the higher education standards. TEQSA, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with interpreting and applying the standards for the purposes of regulation of higher education providers.

Who to Contact about Standards

As outlined above, the Panel and TEQSA have different roles in relation to the higher education standards. In that context the Panel should be contacted where there are concerns or issues in relation to the structure and content of the standards themselves or the work of the Panel.

Matters to do with how the standards are going to be interpreted and applied for regulation should be addressed to TEQSA. (TEQSA has developed forms and guidelines to assist providers in making applications to TEQSA).

The Panel's Mode of Operation

The Panel proposes to operate in a consultative manner with the sector including consultation with providers, peak bodies, students, industry bodies, the relevant Ministers and agencies of the State, Territory and Commonwealth governments and other interested parties. The Panel began its conversation with Ministers at a recent meeting with the Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

Meetings of the Panel

The Panel proposes to meet around every two months, with its meetings augmented by various out-of-session activities including consultation with the sector and other stakeholders.

Contacting the Panel

The Panel can be contacted via the Higher Education Standards Executive at:

standards@teqsa.gov.au

The head of the HES Executive, Dr Lindsay Heywood, can be contacted:

C/- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
GPO Box 1672 Melbourne VIC 3001
T: +613 8306 2507 M: +61 408 136 727
E: Lindsay.Heywood@teqsa.gov.au

Alan Robson
Chair
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