



Higher Education Standards Panel

Communique Number 15 – 12 December 2014

Introduction

Welcome to the fifteenth and final Communique from the inaugural Higher Education Standards Panel (the Panel). The purpose of this Communique is to provide the sector and other stakeholders with a summary of the work of this Panel for 2014 and outstanding elements of the review of the Higher Education Standards Framework.

Review of the Higher Education Standards Framework

From the commencement of its review, the Panel engaged in a transparent, iterative approach to consultation with the sector. This approach provided excellent opportunities for the Panel to test elements of the proposed Framework and discuss and overcome issues raised by stakeholders.

The Panel's process has set a benchmark for consultation with the sector and has included the establishment of:

- regular communiques to the sector since June 2012 providing updates on the review, summaries of issues raised in consultations and the Panel's response to issues
- a mailing list to distribute communication from the Panel, including the communiques and calls for comment with approximately 1200 contacts for Call for Comment 3, with some contacts (e.g peak bodies) acting as forwarding agents to other stakeholders, and
- a website that received approximately 21,600 visits since March 2013, with a peak of more than 4,600 visits during the Call for Comment 3 consultation period.

As part of this communication strategy, the Panel has engaged in over 100 meetings with, and presentations to, the sector and considered the feedback from 230 submissions responding to the three formal Calls for Comment.

The Panel has now provided its advice on proposed revisions to the Higher Education Standards Framework to the Commonwealth Minister for Education.

The version of the Framework that accompanies the Panel's advice to the Minister is available on the Panel's website at <http://www.hestandards.gov.au/final-proposed-framework>. The changes to the Framework that arose from the Panel's final round of consultations are detailed in Communique Number 14. Under section 58(3) of the *TEQSA Act 2011*, the Minister is required to undertake consultation with state and territory Ministers with responsibility for higher education, TEQSA and the Commonwealth Minister with responsibility for research in relation to the Panel's advice. Following this consultation, the Minister will make decisions in relation to the proposed Framework.

Provider Category Standards

The Panel was required by Section 29 of the *TEQSA (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Act 2011* to commence a review of the Threshold Standards within its first year of operation. The Threshold Standards include the Provider Category Standards. In undertaking its initial review the Panel formed the view that the matter of provider categorisation is as much a matter of public policy as it is of standards for higher education. The Panel recommended that the classification

or categorisation of providers should be reviewed before any action was taken on the existing Category Standards.

Review of Provider Categories

As part of initiating a review of the classification of providers the Panel commissioned a number of internationally recognised experts to provide opinion pieces to the Panel on the likely future of higher education systems in countries that are experiencing similar circumstances and drivers for change in higher education. These drivers include increasing demand for skills, globalisation, increased participation in higher education and changing models of participation and delivery. The Panel also sought the advice of the LH Martin Institute in synthesising the views of international experts in the Australian context.

On the basis of that work, the Panel has prepared a discussion paper for the sector and other stakeholders. This paper provides a brief summary of the circumstances of Australian tertiary education, and higher education in particular, including key drivers for change. The preamble to the current Provider Category Standards makes specific comments on diversity of provision:

Diversity in Australia's higher education system, both within and between higher education providers, is important to meet diverse and changing student, employer and community expectations. The Provider Category Standards are designed to reflect and formalise key elements of this diversity, through the use of titles that are well-understood internationally and which are meaningful to the general public.

The standards also note that all providers of higher education that gain registration by TEQSA through meeting the Threshold Standards become 'Higher Education Providers'. This category title signals to the public that the provider is a bona fide provider of quality higher education in Australia.

The Panel's discussion paper addresses diversity of educational provision in particular. It also poses various questions for consideration by the sector and policy makers. These encompass:

- the objective and merits of the current classification system
- appropriateness of the existing classification for the future
- distribution of providers across the current classification system and its suitability for the future
- options for diversity within and across providers
- incentives for managing the provider diversity
- options for determining provider types
- consideration of the desirability and affordability of narrower missions such as graduate-only providers or broader missions such as more multi-sector provision.

Next Steps

The Panel will be transmitting its discussion paper to the TEQSA Advisory Council for consideration by the Council and determination of the next steps in this work.

Future Communiques

This will be the final communique from the inaugural Panel. Decisions on future communications will fall to the new Panel. In the interim, previous Communiques and summaries of the work of the inaugural Panel will remain available on the Higher Education Standards website: <http://www.HEstandards.gov.au>

Acknowledgements

It has been rewarding to be involved as Chair in the Panel's work, both in developing a revised Higher Education Standards Framework and working closely with the sector and other stakeholders in discussing and testing ideas. In particular, it has been a privilege to work with my colleagues on the Panel who have served with unstinting dedication and commitment to an improved Framework. I also acknowledge the high-level expertise and professional support provided to the Panel by its Executive that not only made the Panel's work possible but enriched the substantive outcomes as well.

On behalf of the members of the Panel and the Executive may I thank all of you who have contributed so constructively to achieving what the Panel hopes to be an enduring beneficial outcome for higher education in Australia and for the students who take part in it.

Alan Robson
Chair, Higher Education Standards Panel
12 December 2014