

Senate Committee: Education and Employment

QUESTION ON NOTICE Additional Estimates 2014 - 2015

Outcome: Agency: TEQSA

Department of Education and Training Question No. SQ15-000085

Senator Xenophon, Nick provided in writing.

TEQSA

Question

1. In relation to TEQSA's Commission and senior management team, are any of those individuals currently employed by a tertiary education provider?
2. If so, how does TEQSA ensure all its members remain independent?
3. What is TEQSA's priority – protecting students by overseeing the quality of service providers, or advocating for those providers in terms of the regulatory environment?
4. There have been some relatively recent concerns raised about the quality of some VET providers in Victoria. I understand VET comes under the provision of the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), but have there been any lessons for TEQSA in these cases?
5. There have been some concerns raised that the Government's proposed deregulation of higher education may lead to an increase in unscrupulous providers. What requirements does TEQSA currently have in place that would protect against this?

Answer

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency has provided the following response.

1. No member of TEQSA's Senior Management Team is employed by a tertiary education provider. Commissioner Linley Martin holds the position of Ombuds at RMIT University, as an independent reviewer of unresolved student and staff complaints, for one day per week.
2. All members of TEQSA staff are required to complete an annual *Declaration of Interests* form in line with TEQSA's Conflict of Interest Policy and the APS Code of Conduct.

s143 TEQSA Act - requires commissioners to provide the Minister with written disclosure of interests that conflict, or could conflict, with the proper performance of a Commissioner's functions. s150 - requires Commissioners to disclose any interests in a matter being considered, or about to be considered, at a meeting of TEQSA.

Where a Commissioner discloses an interest in a particular matter, the remaining members of the Commission determine whether the Commissioner should be present for, or participate in, TEQSA's deliberations on the matter.

3. TEQSA is responsible for the quality assurance of higher education providers in Australia. TEQSA does not have an advocacy role for higher education providers. TEQSA's objects, as described in the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* include to:
 - provide for national consistency using a standards-based quality framework and principles;
 - protect and enhance Australia's reputation for quality higher education as well as excellence, diversity and innovation in higher education in Australia;
 - protect students undertaking higher education and ensure that students have access to accurate information relating to higher education; and
 - encourage and promote a higher education system that is appropriate to meet Australia's social and economic needs.
4. TEQSA cannot comment on individual providers or assessments. TEQSA has a memorandum of understanding in place with ASQA and works closely with that agency. Under the MoU, the two agencies share information in relation to the assessment of dual-sector providers including those registered on CRICOS.
5. TEQSA implements a risk-based approach to assuring compliance of higher education providers against the Higher Education Standards Framework. Providers are required to demonstrate compliance with the standards through the provision of evidence. TEQSA has designed its approach and processes so that the scope of assessment and monitoring as well as the regulatory decisions taken are informed by a provider's higher education track record, regulatory history and risk profile.

For providers that are applying for initial registration, TEQSA will always undertake an assessment against the full range of Threshold Standards.