

**Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee
Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill 2014**

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Agency – Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

Senator Carr asked on 7 October 2014, Hansard page 72

Question 1

Staffing Reductions

Senator KIM CARR: Are there fewer staff?

Prof. Saunders: There are fewer staff.

Senator KIM CARR: How many?

Prof. Saunders: At the end of September, we had a headcount of 66 in the agency.

Senator KIM CARR: What is the reduction?

Prof. Saunders: I think before the reductions commenced we were at a staffing level of about 92 or 93, but I would have to take that on notice.

Senator KIM CARR: So it is the better part of a third of your staff but it is a 40 per cent reduction in your funding. Do you anticipate there will be more staff lost?

Answer

Staff Numbers:

As at 1 May 2014 - 84

As at 30 September - 66

There is not likely to be any further net reductions to the current total staffing level in 2014-15.

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Question 2

Marketing Behaviour - Risk

Senator KIM CARR: Can I go through a few of these points that you have raised, since you have indicated that you have been consulting with the sector. What are the biggest risks that you foresee in the new, deregulated climate?

Prof. Saunders: There are a number, but the biggest risks have to do first of all with student progress: attrition of students, students dropping out, particularly out of first year. I think there is good experience in the sector that shows that students at risk need to be identified and they need special support. So one of our concerns, and indeed one of our focuses, is in fact to make sure that there is adequate student support, both pastoral support and academic support, to try and minimise attrition. The second is the quality of the student experience—making sure that the students have a positive experience and succeed. Both of those risks also tie in to the qualifications and experience of the academic staff in particular that are engaged by the provider, in terms of both academic Leadership and casual workforce. These are matters which are risks that are recognised. Many providers recognise that themselves and have excellent systems in place to manage those risks. On the financial side of things, as you have already stated, financial matters really go to the willingness of providers to invest in staff. Of the risks that you might see on the financial side, student numbers and profitability are one thing in terms of the viability of the provider and, secondly, their willingness to invest in staff and adequate academic support facilities, like library, IT platforms and the like.

Senator KIM CARR: What about marketing behaviour? Have you considered there would be any risks there?

Prof. Saunders: That is not something that has been discussed with me in the last month. It may well have been discussed within the agency, and I can take that on notice if you wish.

Answer

The Threshold Standards require information and marketing to be accurate and clear to students and other stakeholders.

While it is too early to predict any marketing issues that might arise from the higher education standard reforms, TEQSA will monitor this issue.

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Question 3

Increase in applications of new registrations, from new providers or non-university providers like TAFE colleges

Senator KIM CARR: Do you anticipate there will be changes in behaviour as a result? Let us take, for instance, the question of the 500-student threshold for the scholarships. Do you anticipate that a provider might, when approaching an enrolment of 500, split itself in two so it avoids that obligation? Is that the sort of thing that you would have considered?

Prof. Saunders: That has not been discussed with me. I have not raised that with others. Again, I can take that on notice.

Senator KIM CARR: What I am particularly interested in is how you would police those types of arrangements. You might well say to me that it is hypothetical, but what action would you be considering to deal with a situation such as that which I have outlined?

Answer

Any strategy a provider might employ would have to comply with the Threshold Standards. If it were to 'split into two', to create two entities, then both entities would need to be registered as higher education providers and in order to be registered, each would have to meet all the Provider Registration Standards.

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Question 4 and 5

Applications from institutions seeking registration or seeking to move into higher education

Senator KIM CARR: Have you had any applications or any inquiries from institutions seeking registration or seeking to move into higher education?

Prof. Saunders: Not that I am aware of.

Senator KIM CARR: Would you take that on notice?

Prof. Saunders: I can take that on notice.

Senator KIM CARR: What about overseas universities? Have we had any inquiries from overseas universities?

Prof. Saunders: Not that I am aware of—and I will take that on notice too.

Answer

TEQSA has received between 30-40 enquiries over the past 12 months from institutions considering applying for registration as a higher education provider. These enquiries have ranged from a single brief email to discussions about the nature of the application process. Five applications for initial registration have been received in this period

There have been two enquiries from overseas universities in the past 12 twelve months.

All overseas universities have to meet the Provider Category Standards for Overseas Universities