QUESTION ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018

Outcome: Agency: TEQSA

Department of Education and Training Question No. SQ17-000568

Senator O'Neill, Deborah asked on 31 May 2017, Proof Hansard page 26.

TEQSA: work program

Question

Senator O'NEILL: I invite you to indicate the things that are now on the backburner—the things that are slowing down. If you could provide us with an indication of the workflow that is a consequence of the pressure that you are feeling with regard to managing the volume of applications coming through, that would be useful.
Prof. Saunders: Sure, I could take that on notice and provide that.
Senator O'NEILL: Thank you. If you could also go through your records and indicate when you advised the minister of the surge in applications that you are experiencing and any responses that you have had from him, that would be appreciated. Do you have a forward work plan for managing this?
Prof. Saunders: We have a forward work plan, yes, for managing this.
Senator O'NEILL: If you could provide any detail about that, that would be good.

Answer

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

TEQSA has focused its resources on addressing the areas of highest risk to the quality of Australian higher education and the *Education Legislation Amendment (Provider Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2017* will assist in limiting the unethical practices observed in the Vocational Education and Training Sector occurring in the higher education sector. As a consequence of this focus and in order to manage the increasing volume and complexity of applications requiring assessment, the provision of expert support and guidance to the sector has been delayed. Delayed activities include:

• assessment of applications without legislative timeframes.

• the external reporting program including reporting on: assessment outcomes and insights; an exploration of the relationship between risk assessment findings and the outcomes of assessment processes; and analysis and research on ongoing or emerging issues important to higher education.

• guidance to support the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (HES Framework) which came into effect on 1 January 2017 – 21 guidance notes have been released for comment and a further eight guidance notes awaiting finalisation.

• the development of guidance for the sector on the characteristics of good practice, and in particular good practice material in relation to academic integrity.

There has also been an increase in processing times.

Assessment processing times (average number of days):

Assessment Type	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17 YTD
Registration	381	303	256	322	326
Re-registration	229	279	256	248	387
Accreditation	263	292	195	186	248
Re-accreditation	215	275	245	276	362

In addition, the legislative deadline for the assessment of nine applications for registration from prospective providers was not able to be met due to the volume of these applications in the first half of the 2017 calendar year.

TEQSA forward work plan

The forward work schedule comprises five key groups of applications with different levels of predictability in terms of timeframes. These groups can be described as follows:

1. *Applications that have been submitted and are currently under assessment.* As of 20 June 2017, TEQSA had 241 major assessments (predominantly registrations, re-registrations, accreditations and re-accreditations and CRICOS registrations and re-registrations). There are also another 70 assessments in progress in relation to other CRICOS matters such as, for example, changes to student capacity or delivery site.

2. *Applications for re-registration that are expected to be received.* Based on the current registration periods of existing providers, TEQSA expects 230 applications for re-registration from providers between July 2017 and 30 June 2021 under the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA Act) and *Education Services for Oversease Students Act 2000* (ESOS Act). This includes 11 applications under the TEQSA Act from Australian universities that have yet to be assessed by TEQSA since commencement of operations (in 2012) and 140 CRICOS re-registrations.

3. *Applications for re-accreditation of existing courses.* TEQSA accredits courses for providers without self-accrediting authority. There are currently 1060 courses that are accredited by TEQSA. TEQSA currently expects 586 applications for re-accreditation of courses from 85 providers between July 2017 and 30 June 2021. The exact timing of applications for re-accreditation of existing courses can be subject to the business decisions of providers in relation to their course offerings.

4. *Applications for accreditation of new courses from registered providers.* Applications for accreditation of new courses of study are subject to the business decisions of providers and it is therefore difficult to predict when they will be submitted. However, in the case of newly registered providers, TEQSA has observed a steady growth in the submissions of applications for new courses following the commencement of operations.

5. *Applications for registration and course accreditation from prospective providers.* TEQSA has maintained a record of those entities that have indicated an intention to submit an application for registration. (See Attachment A Prospective Higher Education Providers Update January – March 2017). However, although there is no legislative requirement to advise TEQSA of when an application will be submitted, the TEQSA Act requires assessment within prescribed timeframes which has resulted in the assessment of these applications being given priority over the assessment of other groups of applications. Applications to register under the ESOS Act (CRICOS registration) in order to deliver courses to international students are submitted following registration as a higher education provider.

The above listing excludes external review matters that arise in relation to adverse decisions, compliance assessments that arise in relation to high risk providers and monitoring of compliance with conditions on registrations and accreditations and other CRICOS decisions that are all resource intensive assessment activities that occur in response to multiple factors and over varying timeframes. In the case of potential provider failure, such as for the recent case with the Australian School of Management, resources will be drawn from other regulatory assessment work to undertake investigations and to liaise with other agencies, the provider representatives and students.

The forward work plan to cope with this level of activity and other arising priorities has a number of elements: TEQSA has reorganised into specialist teams to which assessments are now allocated according to risk level, with separate teams focusing on areas of particular complexity or with legislative deadlines; staffing needs are calculated and contract staff engaged flexibly to supplement the efforts of our core staff in response to increased workload; progress against assessment targets are regularly reviewed by the relevant directors and reported on a monthly basis to the Senior Management Team and the Accountable Authority; and the resource represented by our external experts has been drawn upon more heavily to help with workload pressures.