

Media Release —

ANAO Audit Of Higher Education Regulator Welcomed By Independent Providers

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For Immediate Release

The review of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) undertaken by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) has been endorsed by the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA), the peak body representing independent providers in the higher education, vocational education, training and skills sectors.

“On balance, independent higher education providers are comfortable with the work of TEQSA. As a regulator, there is no doubt that it acts fairly and impartially; however, the ANAO audit has highlighted opportunities to improve TEQSA’s compliance activity and ITECA welcomes this,” said Mr Troy Williams, ITECA Chief Executive.

TEQSA received around \$17.5 million in public funding during FY2019-20 and regulates a sector with around 1.6 million students, of which 10% of these are with independent higher education providers. The ANAO audit of the higher education regulator is significant in this context.

“The ANAO audit identified the shared experience of ITECA members, that TEQSA’s approvals processes were effective but not always timely, particularly with re-registration and re-accreditation. That TEQSA has acknowledged the areas in which regulatory approvals processes can be improved is an important first step in better meeting the expectations of ITECA members,” Mr Williams said.

Of concern was that as at December 2019, TEQSA’s compliance and enforcement policy was not supported by implemented operational plans or procedures. The ANAO noted that TEQSA has not undertaken annual or other periodic compliance reporting, with compliance assessments largely taken in response to adverse media coverage of providers advising TEQSA of issues relating to compliance.

“ITECA is concerned that the absence of operational plans and procedures may give rise to inconsistent compliance activity and its apparent reliance on adverse media reporting is disconcerting; however, that these issues are now actively being addressed by TEQSA is encouraging,” Mr Williams said.

ITECA noted that TEQSA has yet to take action to respond to cyber security risks, an issue that the independent sector looks forward to working with the regulator to address.

“Cyber security is a growing concern for both independent providers and public universities and given TEQSA’s reputation for first-rate stakeholder consultation, ITECA is confident that an approach to cyber security will reflect the shared experience and risk of our members,” Mr Williams said.

On balance, ITECA believes TEQSA to be a good regulator and one that is positively engaged with the independent higher education sector.

“ITECA members are largely comfortable with the approach of TEQSA to its compliance activity and there is a shared belief that it’s the best of the four regulators in the tertiary education sector across Australia,” Mr Williams concluded.

ITECA has formally written to ANAO requesting an audit of the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), the nation’s vocational education and training sector regulator.

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