

Additional Estimates 2019-20 – ASQA Opening Statement

As the Committee will be aware, in September last year, Skills Ministers outlined their expectations of ASQA going forward – including that ASQA improve its engagement with the sector and expand its educative role. Skills Ministers also requested immediate work to reform ASQA’s regulatory approach, improve confidence in the regulator and support continuous improvement in VET.

ASQA welcomed these statements and heard the feedback of key stakeholders, including through our own consultation, about ASQA’s role, our regulatory approach and our evolution as a modern regulator in line with broader reform across the sector.

ASQA is keen to contribute to VET reform, including regulatory reform and to extend our oversight of the sector to include new ways of connecting with stakeholders and providing advice that moves beyond the achievement of minimum standards.

ASQA also welcomed the subsequent announcement by the Government of funding to support ASQA in broadening our educative approach.

We are already taking steps to evolve our engagement and education of the sector, with recent and planned activities including:

- a new website launched in January that provides clearer and more user-focused information for the sector.
- a series of new webinars to help providers understand key issues and changes in the sector.
- engaging audio and video content in partnership with the sector with the release of the first two vodcasts including contributions from stakeholders from within ITECA, the TAFE network and Community Colleges Australia.
- a Stakeholder Liaison Group to create a stronger connection with the sector will be established over the coming weeks which will assist to identify and respond to key issues facing providers.
- in line with a broader and more systemic focus on quality practice, ASQA is considering how it can support and facilitate a culture of effective self-assurance as an integral part of a provider’s routine operations.
- And better explaining audit outcomes – both in the report and in discussions with RTOs.

Of course, there will be other initiatives in the future. Fundamentally, ASQA shares the same interests and objectives as the VET sector. We want to ensure that quality providers are receiving the support they need and that students are both protected and experiencing positive education outcomes.

We will of course continue to perform our role in regulating the sector and addressing issues as we need to. Governments across Australia and other key stakeholders continually identify the need for ASQA to maintain its strength and capability to respond to poor practice efficiently and effectively. I also want to ensure that there is confidence in ASQA that our activities and decisions are reasonable, transparent and effective and there is confidence in the quality of the VET sector.

Part of the Government's investment in measures to improve regulation included undertaking a rapid review of ASQA's regulatory practices and processes, governance and culture. This review, which commenced in November last year, is designed to, amongst other things:

- evaluate the effectiveness of ASQA's internal regulatory practices and processes
- identify and recommend any changes to ASQA's processes to support consistent, risk-based and contemporary regulatory decision-making and education
- identify and recommend changes to ASQA's governance arrangements – and this aspect of the review has already informed the development of the recent before the Parliament and
- identify areas in which changes could be made to the VET Quality Framework to drive improvements across the sectors.

The review is expected to report to Government later in March.

My comments earlier about supporting greater capacity for self-assessment across the sector stem from the review's consideration of how ASQA might best support the sector to lift the conversation beyond compliance, to focus on quality.

ASQA also welcomes the new governance arrangements proposed in the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment (Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2020 now in the Parliament.

The Bill sets out a structure that replaces commissioners with a single chief executive officer, supported by enhanced internal senior executive capacity. It also introduces an advisory council comprising experts from regulatory practice, sector and business engagement, and education and training.

The model represents a significant shift and step forward for ASQA, and will support the agency to continuously improve as a regulator while maintaining independence with respect to regulatory decision-making. This Bill also supports the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2019 which was recently passed by Parliament that focuses on improving the transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of ASQA.

In summary, ASQA is focused on quality outcomes. ASQA is doing, and over its relatively brief history has done, a lot of great work to support quality in vocational education and training. As I mentioned at the outset, ASQA acknowledges the feedback of stakeholders. Like all organisations seeking to continually improve, the current reform agenda has presented a great opportunity to identify further areas for improvement beyond those ASQA has previously identified.

Building on the valuable path set by the Braithwaite and Joyce reviews, the rapid review is now looking at what needs to be done to ensure we continue to evolve as a modern regulator that is fit-for-purpose.