

## ASQA OPENING STATEMENT

As has likely been reflected throughout the week, the last financial year and particularly 2020 has obviously presented considerable challenges and the VET sector is no exception.

However, while the sector has faced challenges like never before, there have been positives to come from this disruption, not least of which is the agility and resilience shown by providers in how they have been able to pivot and positively adapt their practices in response to the pandemic.

As for all parts of government, 2019-20 has been a challenging year for ASQA. Again though, the events of this year have opened up opportunities for ASQA. The circumstances of COVID have meant that we have effectively fast-tracked implementation of some of our reform focus, in particular in working to develop a strong and productive relationship with the sector. We collaborated with providers to provide relevant guidance and educative material where it was needed most, and communicated the most pressing risks in a transparent way.

Supporting providers to respond and meet their obligations, initially to the bushfires and then to the pandemic, has allowed us to strengthen the way we engage with the sector, which is a cornerstone of our reforms.

Since this Committee last met, the Government published the Report of the Rapid Review of ASQA's Regulatory Practices and Processes on 30 April.

The review found that while our purpose remains appropriate, there are opportunities to strengthen our regulatory approach, particularly in the areas of engagement and education and aspects of our regulatory practice, to better align with best practice regulation.

Government has accepted all of the recommendations, which confirm ASQA's focus to:

- strengthen our engagement and education programs
- to clarify our role and regulatory approach
- to build a common understanding of self-assurance and excellence in outcomes
- to align our practices and governance accordingly
- to provide more considered and meaningful reporting on provider performance and
- to undertake appropriate and proportionate regulatory action as required.

This is a significant change agenda for ASQA. We are committed to executing this well because of the improvements it will deliver to providers, students and the Australian community.

There will be a range of changes over the coming months and years for both ASQA and the sector. Many of which will be reflected in our performance reporting from 2021-22.

Specifically in relation to COVID-19, ASQA recognises the significant impact on providers. We has been focused on supporting providers during the pandemic, by

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listening to the issues they have been facing and responding by reducing regulatory burden wherever possible and providing greater levels of education and guidance.

We continue to maintain a flexible approach to regulating the sector during these challenging times, while supporting providers to remain compliant and maintain the quality of their training and assessment.

Over recent months, we implemented a variety of measures to support the sector to respond.

Of course, even a pandemic does not decrease the importance of continued regulatory oversight of the VET sector.

ASQA developed and implemented a COVID-19 Risk Monitoring Strategy to guide our regulatory approach over these past months. This aimed to support providers to manage key risks to quality training outcomes identified in light of COVID-19, while continuing to apply regulatory scrutiny where necessary.

We have received broad support for our engagement and approach and this type of feedback is generally reflected in the Annual report and our Annual Performance Statement, which demonstrate a solid level of performance during this period of substantial change. ASQA met or partially met all six of its performance criteria.

Although we did not fully meet some of our Service Standards, the reporting period demonstrates overall improvements compared to the previous financial year, and trends indicate this improvement is continuing into 2020-21.

While it has been a challenging year, ASQA has responded to these challenges by harnessing the opportunity of working closely with stakeholders and the sector to adapt and enhance our regulatory approach to ensure quality vocational education and training so that students, employers, the community and governments can have confidence in the integrity of national qualifications issued by training providers.