

**Senate Committee: Education and Employment**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Supplementary Budget Estimates 2015 - 2016**

**Outcome: Agency: TEQSA**

**Department of Education and Training Question No. SQ15-000786**

Senator Carr, Kim provided in writing

***TEQSA - registrations***

**Question**

According to Government News (7 October 2015), it is taking TEQSA as long as nine months to perform its registration function with regard to private providers. Can you confirm that?

Is nine months is your statutory limit?

What proportion of applications is taking nine months? What is the average length of time required?

To what extent is this due to resource constraints? Is it connected to staff cuts? Can you confirm that you have called the situation "challenging"?

How many complaints have you received this year about delays in registration, re-registration and accreditation? Can you provide details?

Is it the case that these problems are faced by private providers, not by public universities?

What are the implications for private providers' ability to operate on a level playing field with universities?

How can this situation be improved? Is it feasible or desirable to lower the bar for registration and re-registration? Are there good reasons to lengthen the periods between accreditation and re-accreditation of courses? What are the dangers here?

**Answer**

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

Under section 21(2) of the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (the TEQSA Act), TEQSA must make a decision on an application for (initial) registration within nine months of receiving it, which is taken to be the date on which payment of the fee is received for substantive assessment. The same timeframe applies to (initial) applications for course accreditation. This timeframe may be extended under section 21(3) of the TEQSA Act for reasons beyond TEQSA's control.

There are no legislative timeframes for renewal of registration or renewal of course accreditation.

In FY2014-15, TEQSA approved three applications for initial registration, and the average time taken to make a decision was 7.5 months from the time the applications were received, with the longest taking 9.7 months.

The median time taken for initial accreditation was 5.6 months in the same financial year. The average time taken for renewal of accreditation was 8.6 months in the same financial year.

The amount of time between receiving an application and making a final decision varies according to a number of factors, including:

- the quality of the application material and evidence provided by the applicant
- the extent to which the applicant evidently meets the required standards
- the time taken by applicants to respond to TEQSA's requests for additional information
- the time taken by applicants to respond to TEQSA's findings
- the need for TEQSA to seek legal advice on adverse findings
- legal actions taken by the provider against adverse findings
- the resources available to TEQSA to conduct the assessment and support the assessment process.

Non self-accrediting providers (a majority being private providers) are impacted by the time taken to gain approval for initial registration and initial course accreditation to the extent that this may delay their ability to take courses to market. Providers with self-accrediting authority do not have to apply to TEQSA for their courses to be accredited. However, many of the factors that contribute to delays are beyond TEQSA's control.

TEQSA has not received any complaints this year about the time taken in reaching a decision on applications.

Average times taken by TEQSA to reach a decision can be improved by a range of factors, including:

- applications submitted by providers more fit for purpose
- applicants responding more quickly to TEQSA's requests for information
- applicants responding more quickly to TEQSA's findings
- increasing resources available to TEQSA to conduct the assessment and support the assessment process
- further streamlining of TEQSA's internal processes for assessing applications for renewal of course accreditations.

TEQSA does not consider it desirable to 'lower the bar' on applications for registration or renewal of registration as these are key controls that preserve the quality of Australia's higher education, especially in the case of initial registration. At the same time, TEQSA has already taken a number of steps to reduce the amount of evidence that providers need to attach to applications for renewal of registration and renewal of course accreditation.

TEQSA does not consider it desirable to lengthen the periods between accreditation and re-accreditation of courses. The maximum period of seven years is already quite long by international standards (five years is more common in other jurisdictions) and five years is a common period of internal accreditation by self-accrediting providers. Lengthening the maximum periods to ten years could enable variations in course quality to go undetected by TEQSA for too long.