

Senate Committee: Education and Employment

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2015 - 2016

Outcome: Agency: TEQSA

Department of Education and Training Question No. SQ15-000801

Senator Carr, Kim provided in writing

TEQSA - VET providers and FEE-HELP loans

Question

Is TEQSA aware of problems pointed out by Mr Adrian McCombe of COPHE with the registration applications of VET providers, wanting to move into the higher education sector to take advantage of FEE-HELP loans? Does TEQSA share his concerns?

In TEQSA's view, do VET and higher education have "different cultures"? What are the implications of this, for TEQSA in its gatekeeper role?

Given your resource constraints, are you concerned about TEQSA's capacity to assess these applications with enough care and attention? How would you respond to calls to streamline this process, in these instances?

Answer

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

All applicants for registration must demonstrate that they meet the relevant Threshold Standards, which pose some challenges for all organisations that have not delivered higher education courses before.

Specifically, Category Standard 1.3 requires that 'the higher education provider delivers teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry', and Category Standard 1.4 requires that 'The higher education provider's academic staff are active in scholarship that inform their teaching' etc.

Applicants for initial registration must demonstrate that they have academic leaders in place or have specific plans to engage academic leaders who are able to build a higher education learning environment. Not only should these leaders have a track-record in scholarship themselves, but they need to have the experience necessary to build scholarship in other staff, and to ensure that the provider is positioned to design and deliver courses at the appropriate level, with input from staff who are themselves active in scholarship.

TEQSA is confident of its continuing ability to assess these applications with sufficient care and attention. While sufficient care and attention can be maintained, TEQSA has stated previously that it expects, due to resourcing constraints, the time taken to assess applications to increase in the short term.

TEQSA does not consider it desirable to streamline these assessment processes, as considerable care and attention is needed to ensure that the quality of Australian higher education is maintained, and that applications for initial registration are only approved when applicants meet the Threshold Standards.