Quality Management in Higher Education in Australia – the Changing Landscape
The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)\(^1\) will supersede the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) during 2011 and will introduce for the first time the quality assurance of standards across the sector in Australia. Similar standards have already been introduced in Europe and the UK\(^2\). The *Australian Higher Education Standards Framework* will consist of the following minimum or threshold standards that providers are to meet\(^3\):

**Provider Registration Standards**
- Legal status and standing.
- Financial viability and safeguards.
- Governance.
- Management.
- Primacy of academic quality and integrity.
- Responsibilities to students.
- Human resources and professional development.
- Physical resources and infrastructure.

**Qualification Standards**
The Australian Qualification Framework

**Research standards**
Benchmarks for research

**Information standards**
Information that providers should make available to TEQSA and to the market

**Teaching and Learning**
Benchmarks for teaching and learning quality assurance

**Provider Category Standards** (for each type of provider):
Registered higher education provider, university, university of specialisation, university college, Australian campus of overseas provider

AUQA worked with the sector to influence quality management processes and did not have the legal power to sanction providers. Also, higher education providers to date have either been registered through regulatory authorities in their home states and territories or have been established through state or territory based legislation. Non self-accrediting higher education institutions (mostly non-university providers) also had their courses accredited through the states and territories. However, legislation passed by the national parliament in June this year gives TEQSA the responsibility to register all higher education providers and accredit all higher education courses. It also gives TEQSA the

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2 See the Tuning Project in Europe: [http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/](http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/); and in the UK the Quality Standards Agency for Higher Education: [http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp)
power to impose a range of conditions or sanctions on a provider for not meeting the higher education standards.

TEQSA can require a provider to:
- maintain a particular staffing profile;
- provide access to particular facilities; and
- provide particular support services.

And TEQSA can:
- restrict or remove the provider’s authority to self-accredit one or more courses of study;
- restrict or remove the provider’s ability to provide an accredited course;
- restrict the number of students that may enrol in a particular accredited course provided by the provider;
- restrict or remove the provider’s ability to offer or confer a regulated higher education award; and
- de-register the provider.

Furthermore, TEQSA is establishing a higher education register and a My University website which will enable direct comparisons to be made between Australian higher education providers on a number of measures. These include student satisfaction data and measures of graduate skills, and information about student services, graduate outcomes and quality of teaching and learning outcomes. Attachment 1 outlines the four elements of the new quality and regulatory requirements for Australian higher education.

In parallel with these regulatory changes, a series of student cohort and funding adjustments are being initiated. From 2012, Australian public universities will be funded for student places on the basis of student demand. The Government will fund a Commonwealth supported place for all undergraduate domestic students accepted into an eligible, accredited higher education course at a recognised public higher education provider. Universities will not be funded for places that they do not fill.

In addition, the Government has announced its ambition that by 2020 twenty per cent of higher education enrolments at the undergraduate level will be of people from a low SES background. This goal will be directly supported by the injection of an additional $394 million in funding, bringing funding to support the low SES participation targets to a total of $437 million over the next four years. In 2010, the funding provided was about 2 per cent of teaching and learning grants, and this will increase to about 3 per cent in 2011. By 2012, equity funding will increase it to 4 per cent of teaching and learning grants.

The Government has further announced its ambition for growth in higher education attainment, so that by 2025, 40 per cent of all 25 to 34 year olds will hold a qualification at bachelor level or above compared with the current rate of 32 per cent. The achievement of this ambition would produce around 217,000 additional graduates by 2025.

These initiatives present both opportunities and risks for higher education providers. On
the one hand, there are opportunities for increasing student enrolments and funding. On the other, lack of effective preparation for changes to student cohorts may reduce enrolments and teaching and learning funding as well as leave academic and administrative organisational units unready. The projected increases in participation rates and lower SES students will impact on teaching and assessment practice and student support requirements. One of the challenges higher education providers will face will be to maintain exit standards so that students meet the necessary academic standards while at the same time accommodating learners that may not be fully prepared for tertiary study.

A mature quality management system in a complex organisation such as a university describes an integrated approach to strategic goal setting, leadership, planning and management across the whole institution. It is the overall policy and procedural framework within which quality outcomes are pursued and maintained in every aspect of an organisation’s activities. The changing landscape in the higher education sector will impose a significant onus on providers’ quality systems to not only ensure compliance with the new higher education standards but also to allow the institution to demonstrate high quality outcomes for students, to prepare effectively for changes in student cohorts and funding arrangements, and to provide the required increases in levels of student and staff support into the future.

UTAS adopted a Quality Governance Level Principle (GLP) and a Quality Management Policy in December 2010 as initial steps in the development of an all-of-organisation Quality Management Framework (QMF), or quality system. UTAS began the process of developing a QMF partly in response to the significant changes in the demographic and regulatory higher education environments outlined above. Through its strategic goal-setting, planning and management processes, an effective QMF will enable UTAS to monitor the changing environment, assess how to position itself to respond, and implement appropriate strategies.

It is also the case that, because they focus on improving processes and outcomes, effective quality management processes benefit the institution as a whole, the students and staff within it, and relationships with partners and clients. The two drivers for a QMF at UTAS are a focus on improving the quality of processes and outcomes across the University and the demands for greater sector accountability.

For information on the UTAS QMF go to http://www.dvc.utas.edu.au/quality/the-utas-quality-framework

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