



Australian Government
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency



TEQSA



SUMMARY REPORT OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

**2012 PROVIDER
INFORMATION REQUEST**

August 2012

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1. Introduction

In May 2012, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) released a Consultation Paper to seek feedback from the higher education sector on TEQSA's proposed 2012 Provider Information Request. This report provides an overview of key views expressed through the consultation and the response TEQSA is taking in the 2012 Provider Information Request.

The proposed 2012 Provider Information Request outlined an approach to enable TEQSA to effectively carry out its regulatory functions, including regulatory risk assessments against the Threshold Standards. The Consultation Paper sought feedback from all registered higher education providers in Australia, four sector peak bodies and five other stakeholders. It proposed a list of data elements organised around four main areas: Student, Staff, Finance and Student Surveys.

As indicated in the Consultation Paper, the 2012 Provider Information Request is intended to be a short-term solution to help meet TEQSA's immediate information needs. Future information collections will be considered in light of continuing discussions among TEQSA, the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) and key stakeholders; and experience from the 2012 Provider Information Request. In taking this approach, TEQSA is mindful of balancing the need for certainty with the need to take a staged approach providing sufficient time for providers to supply the information.

This report does not attempt to capture all of the feedback received by TEQSA during the consultation but, rather, highlights feedback commonly raised and how this feedback will be incorporated in the final 2012 Provider Information Request. TEQSA would like to acknowledge the considerable time and effort spent as well as the very constructive feedback provided through this process, and to thank all the providers and individuals involved for their contributions.

2. Overview

The Consultation Paper, seeking feedback about the 2012 Provider Information Request, was sent to:

- ▶ 171 higher education providers;
- ▶ four sector peak bodies: Universities Australia (UA), Council of Private Higher Education (COPHE), Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) and TAFE Directors Australia (TDA); and
- ▶ five other stakeholders: National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), Council of Australian Postgraduate Association (CAPA), National Union of Students (NUS), Council of International Students Australia (CISA) and Graduate Careers Australia (GCA).

The Consultation Paper was also posted on the TEQSA website. A total of 73 submissions were received from respondents. In addition, TEQSA held meetings with the peak bodies.

Overall, respondents expressed support for the development of a more consolidated, coordinated national information collection and for the request of data at unit record level, subject to appropriate handling of this information. Whilst respondents expressed broad agreement on the basic scope and priority of the data proposed to be collected in 2012, they also expressed strong support for TEQSA obtaining access to data it requires from existing national collections. There was also some general consensus for TEQSA to more clearly articulate the rationale and use of the proposed data request; as well as links to the Threshold Standards. In addition, respondents also raised a number of questions about the way in which sensitive data would be handled by TEQSA, including issues such as data release under Freedom of Information (FOI) and sharing of data with DIISRTE.

In addition to these common themes, multiple and varying views were expressed about the:

- ▶ definitions of specific terms such as 'legal entity' and 'unit record';
- ▶ amount of time being proposed for returning data to TEQSA;
- ▶ inclusion/exclusion of different data elements in the collection;
- ▶ technical definition or treatment of various data elements; and
- ▶ system and resource implications for providers, if required to supply the data proposed.

The following section provides a more detailed report on submissions received.

3. Key themes

TEQSA has carefully considered all feedback received. In analysing the feedback, TEQSA has found it useful to draw together feedback into a number of common themes. Seven key themes were identified from responses and these are summarised below.

3.1 Need for a single collection

There was considerable support for a consolidated, coordinated and integrated approach to higher education data/information collections. Respondents cited a number of reasons for their support, including to:

- ▶ prevent multiple requests/duplication in different formats at different times;
- ▶ assist with the volume of data reporting and compliance requirements;
- ▶ ensure standardised reporting periods and a standardised set of data as well as consistency in data definitions;
- ▶ reduce administrative burden;
- ▶ enable benchmarking; and
- ▶ enable appropriate quality controls.

Respondents supported the idea of TEQSA working with DIISRTE and other departments and agencies, providers and peak bodies towards the development of a single data/information collection.

3.2 Rationale for request of data

There was general consensus that TEQSA should more clearly articulate the relationship between the data collected and TEQSA's regulatory activities at a detailed level, in particular, the links with the Threshold Standards and published risk indicators. Respondents wanted greater clarity about the way TEQSA intended to use the data, with consideration of the three regulatory principles of risk, proportionality and necessity. Some respondents noted that TEQSA could make supplementary information requests on a case by case basis, where additional data is required as part of a specific investigation or regulatory process.

3.3 Entity scope

Respondents agreed broadly with TEQSA's proposed scope of entity definition. In determining the appropriate 'unit of analysis', TEQSA had proposed that the registered legal entity be the reference point for financial reports, student awards and staff employment. A number of respondents raised queries about the proposed definition, including how third party arrangements would apply.

3.4 Access to unit record data

Support for the request of data at unit record level was considerable. Respondents endorsed unit record extracts, as appropriate, because they:

- ▶ enabled standardisation of reporting;
- ▶ reduced administrative burden and workload in developing aggregated data sets;
- ▶ provided flexibility in analysis;
- ▶ reduced the need for follow-up requests from TEQSA; and
- ▶ enabled global comparisons.

Respondents were, however, concerned about the handling of such data. In particular, they expressed concerns about the proposal to develop and maintain a separate identifier and the handling of the privacy and confidentiality of student and staff information.

3.5 Collection process

Some respondents raised specific concerns about the information collection process, in particular about DIISRTE's data-sharing capacity with TEQSA. Respondents expressed strong support for TEQSA to obtain access to data it requires from existing national collections, especially the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS), and strong opposition to any proposal that requires providers to re-supply such data to TEQSA directly. There were also concerns about the implications the request has on providers which are undergoing renewal of registration in 2012. Most of the concerns, though, centred around the timeframe of the information request, specifically:

- ▶ the impact on small providers;
- ▶ that time might be insufficient to put systems in place to tailor to requirements; and
- ▶ that timelines may be inconsistent with other reporting deadlines.

3.6 Scope of 2012 information request

Respondents expressed broad agreement with the basic scope and priority of the data proposed to be collected in 2012, namely a focus on student, staff and financial data. However, multiple and varying views were expressed about the inclusion/exclusion of different data elements in these areas and about the technical definition and/or treatment of various data elements. Additional data suggested by respondents include data relating to:

- ▶ Commonwealth Higher Education Student Support Number (CHESSN);
- ▶ immigration;
- ▶ research;
- ▶ language spoken at home;
- ▶ equivalent professional experience; and
- ▶ staff on fixed contracts.

Some respondents questioned the value of some of the proposed data elements, including those already collected by DIISRTE via HEIMS:

- ▶ Element 327 - New basis for admission to current course;
- ▶ Element 355 - Unit of study completion status;
- ▶ Element 464 - Discipline code for unit of study;
- ▶ Element 489 - Unit of study census date;
- ▶ Element T001 - Field of education of highest qualification; and
- ▶ Element T002 - Primary teaching field of education.

Respondents also raised specific concerns within the staff, finance and student survey collection domains. These concerns include the use of salary classification, casual staff and financial estimates. Concerns around the student survey collections include the:

- ▶ lack of a common survey instrument and methodology particularly for unit evaluation;
- ▶ lack of consistency across the sector; and
- ▶ issue of sampling and response rate.

3.7 Privacy and confidentiality

A number of providers expressed concerns from both a privacy and commercial sensitivity perspective around the release of information by TEQSA to DIISRTE or, more widely, under FOI laws. Respondents appear satisfied that TEQSA, working within the legal framework required of it, will adopt a professional approach to information handling, as appropriate.

4. TEQSA response to key concerns raised

TEQSA has carefully considered the feedback received and plans to adopt the following approach in responding to the concerns raised. In providing this response, TEQSA has redefined the scope of the 2012 Provider Information Request, while retaining some of the key components. This approach allows TEQSA to focus on the most critical components for 2012 while working with DIISRTE and other stakeholders on a more comprehensive approach to national data collection and reporting that meets TEQSA's needs. This approach also aims to reduce the impact on providers while longer-term arrangements are developed.

1. TEQSA will be working closely with DIISRTE and other key stakeholder groups towards establishing a more integrated and planned approach to national higher education data collection and reporting that better supports TEQSA's information needs.
2. TEQSA will not in its 2012 Provider Information Request seek from providers data which have already been supplied to DIISRTE. This includes HEIMS data, financial information and research data. At this stage, TEQSA will access aggregated data (not at unit record) from HEIMS while longer term arrangements are established. The format and level of detail of data to which TEQSA has access will be addressed by DIISRTE.
3. There may be instances relating to a particular provider where TEQSA does not have access to the requisite information from DIISRTE. For instance, a material change event or regulatory risk assessment may trigger a specific request for further data from an individual provider directly. This may be in relation to a range of data, including student, staff and finance, as deemed necessary.
4. In relation to student data, TEQSA will seek unit record level data for the last three years from providers that do not already report to HEIMS. TEQSA will not seek a unique identifier to be created and supplied. Rather, it will ask that existing identifiers be provided as already recorded in the provider's system. The scope will include all onshore and offshore students for whom a provider takes award responsibility.
5. In relation to staff data, TEQSA will seek unit record level data for the current year only from providers that do not already report to HEIMS. TEQSA will seek award classification levels appropriate for each individual provider. Broad-band classification based on salary may be sought in the absence of award information. The range of dimensions sought will be narrower than those outlined in the Consultation Paper. For example, the field of qualification and field of teaching will not be included in 2012. For casual/sessional staff, a unit record full-time equivalent file will be requested. The scope of the staff collection will only include staff working under employment contracts for the registered provider. Where a substantial workforce is engaged outside direct employment arrangements, TEQSA may seek supplementary information from a provider on an individual basis.
6. In relation to financial data, TEQSA will seek financial information from providers that do not currently report standardised information to DIISRTE.
 - ▶ Under section 27 of the TEQSA Act, TEQSA will seek standard audited financial accounts for the most recent reporting period, provided to TEQSA within six months of that period. Providers are asked to consult the TEQSA website for a more comprehensive explanation of providers' obligations under section 27 of the Act.
 - ▶ As part of the 2012 information request and under section 28 of the Act, TEQSA will seek from providers that do not report standardised financial data to DIISRTE:

- ▶ audited financial statements that are produced under Australian Accounting Standards without modification for the last three years; and
 - ▶ a high-level standardised financial report for the last financial year.
- ▶ No forward estimates will be required in the 2012 Provider Information Request, although, where a provider's financial profile raises questions for TEQSA, projections may be sought from an individual provider, where deemed necessary.
- ▶ The scope of entity for financial reporting will be the registered legal entity. If providers conduct their higher education operations within a subsidiary structure, they may approach TEQSA to discuss appropriate financial reporting.
7. In relation to student survey data, TEQSA will ask providers to supply it with existing internal reports (where available) of the aggregated outcomes and process of student surveys conducted with respect to unit evaluation, course satisfaction and graduate outcomes. TEQSA will not specify standard statistical parameters for surveys for the 2012 Information Collection. TEQSA will continue to work with DIISRTE and the Advancing Quality in Higher Education Reference Group for the development of performance measurement instruments in higher education.
 8. TEQSA acknowledges the suggestions made by respondents in relation to the definition of some data elements. TEQSA will ensure that attention is given to providing detailed and clear definitions of all data elements at the time of the 2012 Provider Information Request. TEQSA also recognises the wide diversity of providers and will take these differences into account.
 9. Taking the re-defined scope set out above into account, providers will be asked to respond to the data request within three months of receiving the formal request from TEQSA. For latest audited financial statements, providers will have the six-month time period permitted under section 27 of the TEQSA Act from the end of their nominated financial reporting period.
 10. TEQSA recognises that providers may not be able to provide data in the form specified in the first instance and may require time to collect the data in a systematic way. TEQSA does not expect providers to make any system changes to meet the 2012 request. Hence, providers are also not expected to supply data where it does not hold such data in any form or if providing the data requires significant changes to systems. Providers in this case should contact TEQSA to discuss the best approach.
 11. TEQSA will publish on its website a document setting out in more detail the links between the data being requested and the TEQSA Regulatory Risk Framework and the Threshold Standards. It is intended that this document will evolve over time.
 12. The Provider Information Request will involve the collection of unit record student and staff data including existing unique identifiers. TEQSA collects, stores, uses and discloses personal information in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles found in section 14 of the Privacy Act 1988. TEQSA has undertaken a comprehensive Privacy Impact Assessment, in response to advice from the Office of the Australian Information Commission, to identify and address privacy issues arising from the 2012 Provider Information Request. In particular,
 - ▶ TEQSA's collection of personal information is confined to that information which is necessary for TEQSA to perform its regulatory functions;
 - ▶ TEQSA has developed both physical and technological security measures to safeguard against loss and unauthorised access, use, modification or disclosure; and
 - ▶ TEQSA does not intend to disclose personal information except for disclosures to consultants involved in the development of these security measures.

5. Next steps

- ▶ TEQSA will make a request under section 28 of the TEQSA Act, by end of August, to all registered providers. This request will be tailored to reflect existing reporting within the sector, largely exempting those providers that already report on student, staff and financial data from much of the scope of the request.
- ▶ TEQSA will establish in the near-term an Expert Reference Group on data and will publish on the TEQSA website the associated terms of reference and membership. Membership will be on the basis of expert knowledge and comprise nominees from the four peak bodies and other expert members.
- ▶ TEQSA will continue to work closely with DIISRTE and other key stakeholders to establish a comprehensive data-sharing capability in order to minimise the reporting burden on providers. Future information collections will be considered in light of these discussions and experience from the 2012 Provider Information Request.

For further information about the consultation process and this summary report, please contact the TEQSA Information Management Team:

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