




Australian Government  
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency



# Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education

## Australia Country Report

TEQSA

*October 2014*

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The terms 'TNE', 'offshore' and 'cross-border' are used interchangeably in this report, and are taken to have the same meaning.

# Introduction

This country report forms part of the Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education (QACHE) Project. It provides a detailed overview of Australia's approach to the regulation and quality assurance of cross-border education provided by Australian higher education providers.

The report includes reference to all applicable legislative provisions and national policies, strategies impacting on the regulation and quality assurance of cross-border higher education, and details of TEQSA's international activities, including regulatory processes and assessment. Finally, case studies of two Australian universities, both of which are heavily involved with cross-border higher education, have been included.

## Executive Summary

The quality of offshore education involving Australian higher education providers is critical to the reputation of individual providers but perhaps more importantly, the reputation of the education sector in general. Offshore operations are open to international scrutiny and have a direct influence on the perceived quality of higher education delivered by Australian providers.

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is the national regulator and quality assurance body for higher education in Australia. TEQSA's operations are legislated by the Australian Government, and its mandate applies both to providers of higher education and their courses of study. An independent Higher Education Standards Panel provides advice to the Government regarding the development of Threshold Standards.

TEQSA is specifically responsible for the registration and quality assurance of higher education providers; the accreditation of higher education courses for providers without self-accrediting authority; and promoting the sector's adherence to national standards of quality.

### **Snapshot**

As at 10 October 2014, 175 providers were registered by TEQSA to deliver higher education qualifications. 43 are universities and authorized to accredit their own courses of study. The remaining 132 providers are privately owned – a mix of profit and not-for-profit entities. Four of these 132 providers are authorised to accredit their own courses of study. The majority of private providers are not authorized to self-accredit, and must apply to TEQSA for accreditation.

While the majority of providers are privately owned, approximately 94% of all students studying Australian higher education qualifications are studying in a university, either on or offshore.

TEQSA's international work informs wide international understanding of, and confidence in, Australian higher education regulation and quality assurance, and supports the recognition of qualifications, employability of graduates and mobility of students.

The *TEQSA International Strategy 2013–15*<sup>1</sup> has three main objectives. These are to:

1. foster cooperative relations with overseas regulatory and quality assurance agencies
2. extend TEQSA's capacity to conduct regulatory activities overseas where Australian institutions are active
3. build confidence in Australia's higher education sector.

<sup>1</sup> [teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/TEQSAInternationalStrategy.pdf](http://teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/TEQSAInternationalStrategy.pdf)

TEQSA's regulatory activity and decisions, culminating in the publication of the National Register of higher education providers, demonstrates to prospective students that the quality of a higher education award received through the Australian higher education system has been assured by a robust regulatory and quality assurance regime. This is the case whether the qualification has been obtained within Australia or through an Australian provider's overseas operations.

TEQSA regulates against a standards-based quality framework<sup>2</sup> and a risk-based framework<sup>3</sup>.

The Threshold Standards, within the standards-based quality framework, are applicable to all higher education providers, including cross-border and third party arrangements. Providers must demonstrate that their higher education courses, in all locations, meet the Threshold Standards.

Three basic regulatory principles guide TEQSA's regulatory work. The principles relate to regulatory necessity, reflecting risk, and proportionate regulation. In addition to guiding TEQSA's regulatory responses, they also guide its assessment processes. More information on the principles is available under 'Approach to Regulation' in Chapter 2.

TEQSA's approach to risk is outlined in its *Risk Assessment Framework*. The Framework incorporates a focus on offshore delivery, and consideration of the history and context of that delivery. TEQSA's approach to identifying risks associated with offshore provision is evolving over time as it draws on and learns from Australia's past and present offshore delivery arrangements, through offshore campuses, partnerships, and third-party arrangements.

TEQSA published an information paper titled '*TEQSA's approach to regulating the offshore provision of regulated HE awards*' in September 2013<sup>4</sup>. TEQSA has the authority to make transnational delivery part of an extended regulatory assessment if it is concerned about a higher education provider's risk of non-compliance offshore.

Providers are required to demonstrate equivalence across all of their delivery sites (both onshore and offshore), and provide TEQSA with evidence to demonstrate this. Using a risk-based approach to regulation means that site visits are not always considered necessary—even for those providers with cross-border activities. The approach adopted for each regulatory process varies, depending on the provider, their history and their risk profile.

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<sup>2</sup> [comlaw.gov.au/Series/F2012L00003](http://comlaw.gov.au/Series/F2012L00003)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/TEQSARiskAssessFramework2014\\_0.pdf](http://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/TEQSARiskAssessFramework2014_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See [teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/RegulatingOffshoreProvisionOfRegulatedHEAwardsInfoSheetv2.pdf](http://teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/RegulatingOffshoreProvisionOfRegulatedHEAwardsInfoSheetv2.pdf)

# Chapter 1 – Cross-border higher education offered by exporting providers

## Overview

Australian universities have been involved in cross-border education since the early 1980s. Engagement models back then were largely driven by individual entrepreneurs, often university faculty, with little attention paid to sustainable quality assurance frameworks and profitable yields from the ventures. Over the years, Australian cross-border engagement has matured, with providers developing sustainable business models, quality assurance frameworks, and dedicated organisational units to manage whole of provider cross-border engagement.

Australia now plays a significant role in the global provision of TNE. The international education and training sector is Australia's fourth largest export industry, and Australia's largest service industry, earning \$15 billion during 2012. The higher education sector made up 66 per cent of total revenue during this period.

Traditionally, international education in Australia has taken the form of international students travelling to Australia to undertake an Australian higher education awards. While these student numbers remain high, there is an increase in the number of students located outside of Australia receiving their education from Australian higher education institutions.

In 2012, there were 246,337 overseas students (EFTSL) enrolled at Australian higher education institutions (see Table 1), equivalent to a headcount of 328,689 students, and representing 27 per cent of total higher education enrolments.

**Table 1: Domestic and overseas higher education students (EFTSL), 2012<sup>5</sup>**

	Universities	%	Private Providers	%	Total	%
Domestic	632,108	74%	32,799	26%	664,906	73%
Overseas	227,187	26%	19,150	37%	246,337	27%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>859,295</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>51,949</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>911,244</b>	<b>100%</b>

Of the total number of students studying at Australian higher education institutions in 2012, 62,538 students (seven per cent of total enrolments) were studying offshore (see Table 2), of which 91 per cent were studying in universities. The total number of students studying offshore grew 2.5 per cent between 2011 and 2012, and 2.8 per cent between 2012 and 2013.

**Table 2: Onshore and offshore higher education students (EFTSL), 2012<sup>6</sup>**

	Universities	%	Providers	%	Total	%
Onshore	802,107	93%	47,577	90%	849,685	93%
Offshore	57,188	7%	5,351	10%	62,538	7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>859,295</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>52,928</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>912,223</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Report on TEQSA Registered Higher Education Providers 2014

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

TEQSA data from 2012 reveals that twenty-two percent of all higher education providers (38 providers) delivered education offshore, the majority being universities (31), of which over half had 1,000 students (EFTSL) or more.

For Australia, forecast growth in cross-border higher education is expected to be more than 430,000 students by the year 2025 (Bohm, et al, 2002). The Government's *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper recognises the importance of Australia's role in transnational education and aims to grow Australia's engagement with the region through offshore delivery.

Australian providers are also active offshore in the provision of vocational education and training (VET). In 2012, 57,000 students were enrolled in offshore campuses of Australian public VET institutions; more than double the onshore international enrolments in public VET institutions.<sup>7</sup>

## Types of delivery/engagement

Most cross-border engagement by higher education providers in Australia is undertaken through partnership or other third party arrangements. These arrangements are often governed by the offshore host country's regulatory environment.

Third party entities may not necessarily be higher education institutions. For some, educational support for foreign institutions may be their core business, such as Navitas Ltd, in partnership with Curtin University in Singapore; others may be educational institutions but not encompass higher education, such as specialist engineering, cultural or scientific institutions. Yet others may involve arrangements with government agencies in the host country.

Other examples of third party entities include private colleges, commercial arms of public universities, and professional associations. Third party entities involved in Australian cross-border activities may also own or have shares in other connected companies, or have other partnerships that they may involve in providing services to support the Australian cross-border activities, for example in relation to marketing, recruitment or English language support. Therefore, in some instances, a matrix of connected companies and partnerships may need to be considered in the assessment of cross-border activities.

Cross-border third party models can be: deep or broad, encompassing several discipline areas with one partner by location, with research, community and industry linkages, and student/staff mobility; or they can be narrow, involving one program or a discipline suite of program offerings. In the latter situation, a provider may have more than one partner in the one location, with arguably greater challenges and resource implications for quality assuring these offerings.

The range of support provided by third parties to higher education providers for cross-border activities also varies. Services provided may include one or more of the following:

- ▶ marketing and communications
- ▶ processing of enrolment applications
- ▶ course fee administration
- ▶ facilities, such as computers, classrooms and library services
- ▶ delivering lectures and/or tutorials
- ▶ provision of learning resources
- ▶ assessment of learning outcomes
- ▶ contextualising course design and curriculum materials for local requirements
- ▶ student support services, such as academic and personal support

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<sup>7</sup> Data collections do not include courses of study delivered by distance education to offshore locations.

- ▶ maintenance of student records
- ▶ research and development.

## Models supporting cross-border education

A number of models used by providers blend educational experiences delivered totally offshore, or both offshore and onshore in Australia. These models may be designed to meet demand for niche programs not readily available in the host country, or high levels of unmet demand where places at local institutions are limited. Models will vary according to circumstances including student demand, price, external funding or incentives, provider reputation, host government policy, and capacity of the provider to deliver quality education in an overseas location.

**Table 3: Types of models supporting cross-border education**

Model	Description and types	Examples
<b>Twinning/ Partner</b>	<p>Part or all of a higher education course of study is conducted in the offshore location (host country) in collaboration with another institution / organisation.</p> <p>Students may have the same material, lectures and examinations as those at the onshore (Australian) location.</p> <p>In cases where part of the course of study is offered in the offshore location, students may then travel to the provider’s home campus or other location in Australia to complete their qualification.</p> <p>For example, twinning arrangements may involve the first half of an undergraduate degree or Masters (coursework) program at an offshore partner, and then completion of the remaining 50 per cent of the program with the Australian provider. This may involve a 2 +2, 1.5+1.5 or a 1+1 year agreement. The provider sets the admission standards by which students are admitted to the final 3 or 4 semesters of the degree program, or the final year of a two-year Master’s program.</p>	<p>RMIT University and Singapore Institute of Management – Bachelor of Business (Accountancy); Master of Finance.</p> <p>Curtin University and Charles Telfair Institute, Mauritius – Bachelor of Commerce.</p>
<b>Articulation/ top up degrees</b>	<p>A provider formally recognises units or courses of study offered by an offshore entity as equivalent for the purpose of enabling students to gain advanced standing, and grants credit into a course of study leading to a higher education award.</p> <p>The provider then delivers that top-up degree offshore.</p> <p>For example, the provider may deliver one or two years of a degree (AQF level 7) ‘on top’ of a</p>	<p>Kaplan Singapore manage Swinburne University’s Bachelor of Business (Tourism Management) top up degree which has entry requirements of Polytechnic and Private Diplomas (assessed on a case by case basis).</p>

Model	Description and types	Examples
	Diploma program offered by an offshore entity.	
<b>Joint/Dual Awards</b>	<p>Joint awards are another form of articulation, involving an award being conferred by both the provider and one or more offshore entities, ('jointly badged'); or dual awards (conferral of an award by both the provider and offshore entity).</p> <p>Joint awards of doctoral degrees (AQF level 10) involving joint supervision arrangements may be referred to as 'cotutelle' degree programs.</p>	<p>Monash University and South East University, China – Master of Transport Systems (joint award).</p> <p>Bachelor of Laws from University of Queensland and LLM degree from Washington University School of Law (dual award).</p> <p>Monash University and Freie Universitat Berlin, joint Doctor of Philosophy (cotutelle program).</p>
<b>Offshore/branch campuses</b>	<p>Established to provide courses of the onshore provider and involving a bricks and mortar presence in the offshore host country. Normally campuses involve full or joint ownership by an overseas entity. Courses taught through this model normally involve higher proportions of face to face teaching than is the case in partner supported cross-border arrangements.</p> <p>Normally a mix of local and Australian staff is hired to deliver courses, and the provider's staff may also teach for blocks of time at the offshore campus. According to Lane (2013) there were 182 branch campuses in 2012, involving 13 countries as either the host or 'exporting' country.</p> <p>Generally, offshore campuses operate as 'teaching only' in the establishment phases and may involve research programs as the campus enhances its financial viability and/or if the government in the host country funds specific research programs at the campus through grants (Lang, 2011:100).</p>	<p>Monash University in South Africa, RMIT University in Vietnam; Curtin University of Technology and Swinburne University in Malaysia; and Monash (in partnership with the Sunway Group) in Malaysia.</p>
<b>Franchised arrangements</b>	<p>Where an offshore entity delivers a regulated course (either in whole or in part) on behalf of a provider under license. Under this model, the provider gives the curriculum and course materials, to the offshore entity.</p> <p>This model is likely to be higher risk as the</p>	



Model	Description and types	Examples
	<p>provider does not contribute to the delivery of the course and has less control over the quality.</p> <p>In many cases, the offshore entity will only provide part of the course (for example a three year Bachelor's degree) and this will be recognised as partial credit toward the qualification offered by the provider in Australia (refer to articulation model noted above).</p> <p>The offshore entity may award an interim qualification that is more readily accepted/ approved by the host country.</p>	
<p><b>Student exchange and mobility programs</b></p>	<p>Allow students to study for a block of time with an offshore entity (or branch/offshore campus) for credit toward their regulated course being offered in Australia ('outward mobility') and/or provide students from offshore entities (or the branch/offshore campus) an opportunity to study at the Australian provider for credit towards their course at the offshore entity (or the branch/offshore campus) ('inward mobility').</p> <p>Another form of student mobility is internationally integrated degree models, such as the Bologna model (3 + 2 + 3 years) which facilitate students undertaking their undergraduate courses at the provider, and their Masters course offshore, such as with the provider's offshore partner.</p> <p>Other forms of student mobility are facilitated through global alliances, such as Universitas 21 which provides larger scale opportunities. Three Australian providers are members: University of Melbourne; The University of Queensland; and the University of New South Wales.</p>	<p>University of Newcastle  <a href="http://newcastle.edu.au/students/study-abroad/student-exchange/where-can-i-go/cooperative-universities.html">newcastle.edu.au/students/study-abroad/student-exchange/where-can-i-go/cooperative-universities.html</a></p> <p>New Colombo Plan</p>
<p><b>Distance (Online) Education</b></p>	<p>Distance education involving cross-border tuition and use of digital technology for delivery and support may be evident to varying levels, such as through the provision of online content, online assessment and/or online learning management. Although distance education is not included in the national higher education data collection for cross-border activities, an analysis by practitioners indicated that in 2010, distance education accounted for 15% of university cross-border activities (Gibson, et al, 2011).</p> <p>While students studying via distance education</p>	<p>University of Southern Queensland and Baikal International Business School, Russia – Bachelor of Business Administration.</p> <p>Bond University's BBT Global Leadership MBA, in partnership with Business Breakthrough, a Business Education Channel in Japan. This includes</p>

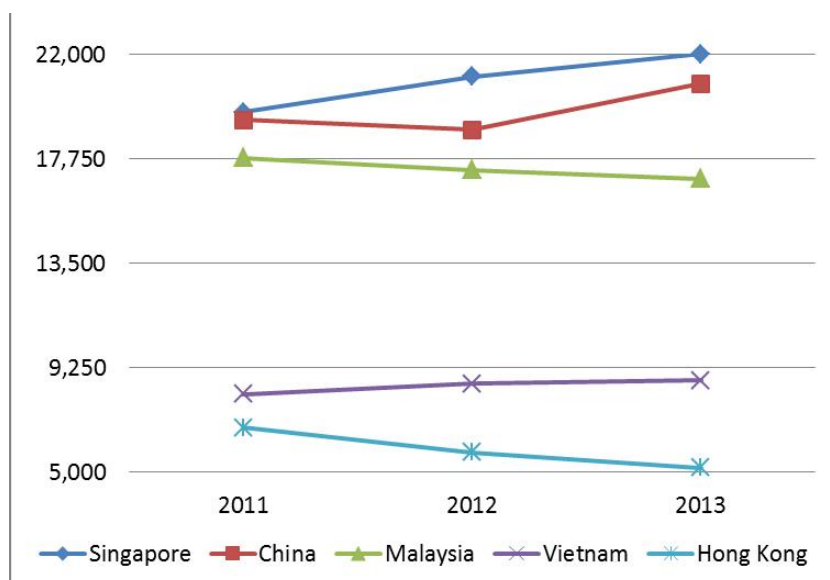
Model	Description and types	Examples
	<p>may be scattered across different locations, some models may involve 'hubs' where students are concentrated in one offshore location with support services provided by a third party.</p> <p>Distance education may involve fully online delivery, or, in the majority of cases, mixed or blended (involving online and face to face instruction).</p>	<p>online provision through course materials, satellite narrowcast lectures, weekly virtual classrooms, and discussion boards as well as annual study tours to Bond University in Australia. (The course is delivered 60% in English and 40% in Japanese).</p>

Higher education providers may also enter into formal arrangements with Australian Registered Training Organisations (i.e. VET providers), delivering diplomas offshore that articulate to degree programs delivered by higher education providers either on or offshore. Regulation of VET is the responsibility of the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). In both on and offshore situations, TEQSA and ASQA share information about the provider's regulatory history and approaches to quality assurance.

### Main receiving countries

The top five home countries of students who received a transnational education in 2013 were Singapore, China, Malaysia, Vietnam and Hong Kong.

**Figure 1: Transnational students by country, 2011–2013**



This differs slightly from the top five nationalities of students studying in Australia over the same period, which were: Chinese, Malaysian, Indian, Vietnamese and Indonesian<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> [https://aei.gov.au/research/ResearchSnapshots/Documents/Transnational%20education\\_HE\\_2012.pdf](https://aei.gov.au/research/ResearchSnapshots/Documents/Transnational%20education_HE_2012.pdf)

## Main providers of transnational education

Based on 2011 figures compiled by Australian Education International, four Australian universities had significant numbers of students enrolled in award programs delivered wholly or partly outside of Australia. They are shown in the table below.

**Table 4: Main higher education providers with students located outside Australia**

University	2011 Student numbers (EFTSL)
RMIT University	11,523
Monash University	8,000
Curtin University	6,286
Swinburne University	3,886

As indicated in the second case study, RMIT University has more international students studying offshore as onshore.

# Chapter 2 – National context and approaches to quality assurance and recognition of CBHE

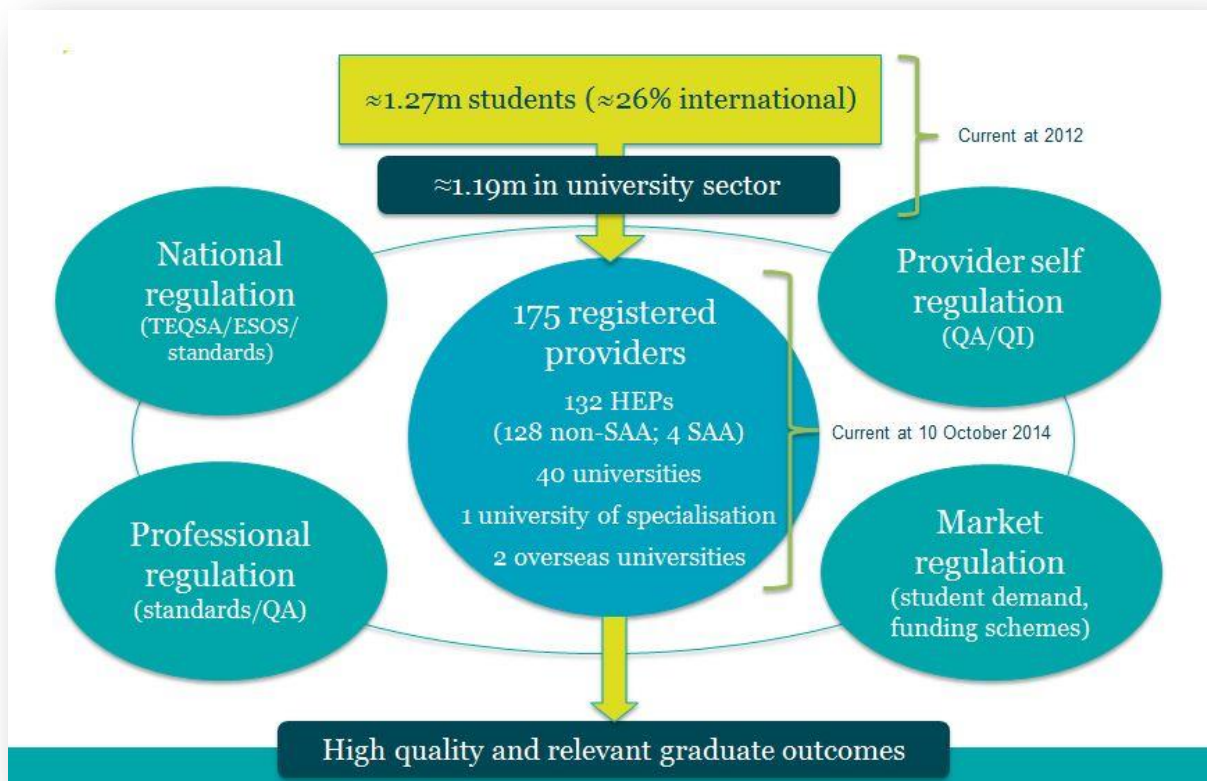
## National Context

TEQSA, the national regulator and quality assurance agency for Australian higher education, was established by the TEQSA Act and commenced operating in January 2012. It replaced nine State and Territory Government Accreditation Agencies, and the (non-regulatory) Australian Universities Quality Agency. The operation of TEQSA is legislated by the Australian Government, and its mandate covers higher education providers and their courses of study.

TEQSA’s aim is to ensure that students receive a quality education at any Australian higher education institution, regardless of where that education is delivered, or how it is delivered.

The higher education sector in Australia includes public and private universities, a wide variety of private higher education providers, and Australian branches of overseas universities. The National Register managed by TEQSA and publicly available on the TEQSA website, is the authoritative source of information on the status of registered higher education providers in Australia. A provider’s registration by TEQSA signals to the public that the provider is compliant with national standards of quality higher education. (See [teqsa.gov.au/national-register](http://teqsa.gov.au/national-register).)

**Figure 1: Australia’s higher education sector**



## Approach to Regulation

TEQSA interprets and implements a national set of standards of quality in higher education – the Higher Education Threshold Standards. The Threshold Standards are determined by the

federal Minister for Education on advice from an independent body, the Higher Education Standards Panel. The Threshold Standards are applicable to all higher education providers registered by TEQSA. It is the responsibility of providers to ensure that their higher education courses meet the Threshold Standards, regardless of location.

TEQSA's approach to quality assurance respects the diversity of the sector, both in terms of academic vision and teaching practice. TEQSA encourages providers to explore innovative approaches to the delivery of higher education, particularly where these lead to increased access by students, without compromising the quality of the learning experience.

TEQSA uses a case management model to manage its relationship with providers. Case managers (in provider teams) are assigned to work with individual providers for their regulatory and quality assurance activities. Each provider team is responsible for up to 30 providers.

In addition to using a standards-based quality framework, three basic regulatory principles are enshrined in the TEQSA Act, which ensures that regulatory decisions and assessment processes are guided by consideration of these principles. The principles are:

**1. Regulatory necessity** – TEQSA only intervenes when necessary. In making its decisions, the TEQSA Commission considers the particular circumstances of a provider and ensures its regulatory responses are the most effective and the least burdensome means of addressing the provider's compliance with the Standards.

**2. Reflecting risk** – TEQSA's decisions reflect the risk of non-compliance with the Threshold Standards. Its risk-reflective approach helps TEQSA to focus on areas of high risk and reduce compliance burden on the sector where possible. Risk assessments inform the level of monitoring or regulatory action that may be necessary.

**3. Proportionate regulation** – TEQSA's regulatory actions are in proportion to any non-compliance, or risk of future non-compliance, by a provider. TEQSA balances the interests of students and the impact of TEQSA's actions on the provider and the sector's reputation.

Providers are required to demonstrate equivalence across all of their delivery sites (between domestic sites and with offshore sites), and to provide TEQSA with evidence of this. Using a risk-based framework means that site visits are not always deemed to be necessary, even for those providers operating offshore, and the approach adopted for each regulatory process varies depending on the provider, their track record and their risk profile.

TEQSA has identified several areas where risk may be greater offshore and should be carefully monitored by providers. Offshore activities may also be a focus of TEQSA as part of normal regulatory processes (usually at the time of renewal of registration or renewal of accreditation of courses). Many offshore arrangements are based on third party arrangements and not the creation of branch campuses. Where this occurs, a third party agreement is required which ensures that the third party will provide services to the level required by the Standards, and the provider is accountable for quality assuring these arrangements.

TEQSA's program of international engagement supports whole of government objectives to grow Australia's export of higher education services, and specifically to achieve:

- ▶ increased access to overseas markets by Australian higher education providers; and
- ▶ greater numbers of international students studying both in Australia and with Australian providers operating offshore.

TEQSA actively works with Australian Education International (part of the federal Department of Education), Austrade (Australian Trade Commission) and other government agencies to

advance the government's policy priorities for international education. Further details of these agencies are included at section 3.1.2.

## 2.1. Overview of the national legal framework and regulations governing quality assurance and recognition of cross-border provision

### TEQSA Act

TEQSA's jurisdiction covers entities offering or conferring 'regulated higher education awards'.

'Regulated higher education awards' are defined at section 6 of the TEQSA Act as including

- a. Australian higher education awards (higher education awards conferred by Australian entities); and
- b. overseas higher education awards (higher education awards conferred by overseas entities), if those awards relate to courses of study provided wholly or mainly at Australian premises.

'Higher education awards' are defined in the TEQSA Act as:

- “(a) a diploma, advanced diploma, associate degree, bachelor degree, graduate certificate, graduate diploma, masters' degree or doctoral degree;
- (b) a qualification covered by level 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10 of the Australian Qualifications Framework; or
- (c) an award of a similar kind, or represented as being of a similar kind, to any of the above awards;

other than an award offered or conferred for the completion of a vocational education and training course.”

Accordingly, TEQSA has jurisdiction over any aspect of a course of study delivered offshore if the course of study leads to a regulated higher education award.

In order to deliver a regulated higher education award, a provider must be registered by TEQSA, in accordance with Part 3 of the TEQSA Act. All registered providers are listed on the National Register.

Registration of a provider by TEQSA is for a period of up to seven years, and providers must deliver some, but not all their courses from premises in Australia.

Whatever cross-border arrangement is contemplated by a higher education provider, and irrespective of the delivery location, responsibility for each regulated award granted and its academic standard is the responsibility of the provider. Regardless of any third party arrangement involved, the provider remains responsible for meeting the Threshold Standards.

A higher education provider must comply with section 31 of the TEQSA Act, which requires the provider to cooperate with TEQSA to facilitate TEQSA's performance of its functions. This section can be used to support TEQSA's access to a provider's cross-border higher education operations, including facilitate site visits by TEQSA in an offshore location where these are deemed necessary.

The TEQSA Act contains a range of offences and civil penalty provisions and states that section 15.4 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995* applies to the offences. This means that offences under the TEQSA Act apply to conduct outside Australia.

## Higher Education Standards relevant to Transnational Education

All providers must meet the Threshold Standards in order to enter and remain within Australia's higher education system. The Threshold Standards apply to all of a provider's activities, regardless of delivery site, and include arrangements with third parties. For example, the *Provider Registration Standards* (PRS) and the *Course Accreditation Standards* (CAS) require:

'Where the higher education provider has an arrangement in place with another entity to manage or deliver some or all of a course of study on its behalf, the HEP has effective mechanisms to manage and quality assure all aspects of the arrangement, including admission and support of students and delivery of the course of study to ensure student learning outcomes equivalent to those for the same or cognate course of study when delivered by the higher education provider.' (PRS 4.5)

'If a course of study is to be offered through arrangements with another entity whether in Australia or overseas, the course documentation specifies the detailed quality assurance arrangements that have been made with the other entity to ensure student learning to those when the course of study is offered directly by the higher education provider.' (CAS 1.10)

'The course of study is designed to ensure equivalent student learning outcomes regardless of a student's place or mode of study.' (CAS 1.9)

## Australian Qualifications Framework

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a national policy, approved by the relevant Council of Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers, for regulated qualifications. The AQF comprises specifications for qualifications within a framework, and policies for issuing qualifications, student pathways, and for registers of qualifications and organisations authorised to issue qualifications. Higher education providers are required to meet the Qualifications Standards (part of the Threshold Standards) which require courses of study to meet the specifications of the AQF. This applies equally to awards conferred by Australian higher education providers. The AQF can be viewed at: [aqf.edu.au](http://aqf.edu.au).

## Education Services for Overseas Students Act

TEQSA is also responsible for regulating against the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (the ESOS Act), which sets out the regulatory requirements for education providers offering courses in Australia to international students on a student visa. The ESOS Act is supported by the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students (the National Code), which is a set of nationally consistent standards that govern the protection of international students and the delivery of courses to those students by providers registered on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS), found at [cricos.deewr.gov.au](http://cricos.deewr.gov.au).

## CBHE policies and strategies at national level

The current regulatory environment was preceded by a number of important developments in relation to the quality assurance of the offshore provision of education. A number of these policies and guidelines remain current and relevant as higher education providers ensure equivalent standards are met for offshore delivery.

From 2002 to 2011, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) which preceded TEQSA, conducted 194 visits to offshore partners or offshore branches/campuses related to 21 Australian higher education providers. The majority of visits were conducted in Singapore, Hong

Kong, China and Malaysia. In preparation for audit, or as a result of audit recommendations, providers reviewed and consolidated offshore course offerings. Many that could not be quality assured, or that were not sustainable financially, were closed.

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) document *Provision of education to overseas students: code of practice and guidelines for Australian universities*<sup>9</sup> (AVCC 2005), provided a charter for universities to adopt and adhere to good practices relating to the recruitment, admission, education and welfare of international students studying at Australian universities both onshore and offshore

The Commonwealth Government's Transnational Quality Strategy (TQS) framework<sup>10</sup>, established in 2005, is based on the principle that courses delivered offshore should be equivalent in standards and outcomes to those delivered in Australia. The TQS aims to protect and promote the quality of education delivered to other countries and focuses on three areas – resources to providers, data provision on cross-border activity and AusLIST, a voluntary tool which lists the programs and offshore delivery sites of Australian providers.

Building on this work is the International Education Association of Australia's (IEAA) guide, developed to assist all Australian practitioners in transnational education in the planning, delivery, evaluation and management of educational programs offshore and to achieve good practice in transnational delivery of their education programs<sup>11</sup>

The Australian Government recently introduced the New Colombo Plan, which aims to lift knowledge of the Indo-Pacific region in Australia and strengthen Australia's people-to-people and institutional relationships through Australian undergraduates undertaking study, amongst other activities, overseas. This initiative supports the increasing number of Australian students wishing to spend part of their studies in a country other than Australia. Internships are integral to the New Colombo Plan, with the aim of ensuring students are work ready, have professional connections in the region, and can link their study experience directly to career opportunities.

### **2.3. National guidelines– covered in above section**

## **2.4. Financial conditions**

### **Description of funding mechanisms which have an impact on QA of CBHE**

Under current arrangements, TEQSA charges fees for its regulatory processes such as course accreditation and renewal of registration but does not charge a separate fee for regulatory activities associated with offshore operations in relation to compliance assessments or enforcement actions initiated by TEQSA.

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<sup>9</sup> See [sydney.edu.au/documents/future\\_students/CodeOfPractice.pdf](http://sydney.edu.au/documents/future_students/CodeOfPractice.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> *National Quality Strategy for Australian Transnational Education and Training* at: [csu.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/51473/Transnational-Ed\\_QualStrat\\_.pdf](http://csu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/51473/Transnational-Ed_QualStrat_.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> IEAA, 2008 *Good Practice in Offshore Delivery* [aei.gov.au/About-AEI/OffshoreSupport/Documents/TNE%20Good%20Practice%20Guide%20FINAL.PDF](http://aei.gov.au/About-AEI/OffshoreSupport/Documents/TNE%20Good%20Practice%20Guide%20FINAL.PDF)



# Chapter 3 – Criteria and guidelines for quality assurance of CBHE

## 3.1 Actors involved in quality assuring (evaluating, accrediting) exported cross-border education provision

### 3.1.1 Role of the national agency/agencies

Qualifications delivered by higher education providers range from undergraduate awards, (bachelor degrees, associate degrees or advanced diplomas) to postgraduate awards, including graduate diplomas, masters' degrees and doctoral degrees.

TEQSA's responsibility for regulatory and quality assuring offshore provision of higher education (at section 3 of the TEQSA Act) includes protecting and enhancing:

- ▶ Australia's reputation for quality higher education and training services
- ▶ Australia's international competitiveness in the higher education sector
- ▶ excellence, diversity and innovation in higher education in Australia
- ▶ students undertaking, or proposing to undertake, higher education in Australia by requiring the provision of quality higher education.

As noted previously, TEQSA must conduct its regulatory responsibilities in accordance with three basic principles for regulation within the TEQSA Act (Part 2) - necessity; reflecting risk; and proportionality. These principles determine how TEQSA considers the scope of assessment and type of assessment undertaken for providers with offshore higher education provision.

TEQSA monitors each provider's offshore student enrolments and outcomes through annual risk assessments. Providers that do not report to the Commonwealth Government provide student data, including data relating to offshore students, annually to TEQSA. Details of TEQSA's approach to risk assessments are available at: [teqsa.gov.au/regulatory-approach/risk-assessment-framework](https://teqsa.gov.au/regulatory-approach/risk-assessment-framework).

### 3.1.2 Role of other actors

#### Professional Accreditation/Registration Bodies

TEQSA ensures that providers involved in offshore provision leading to a higher education award have taken account of any international professional accreditation or registration requirements applicable. Professional accreditation/registration will be considered from the perspective of meeting requirements for graduates to be able to work in the discipline area in Australia, as well as meeting any criteria that relate to the status/recognition of the qualification in the host country where applicable. In some cases, the Australian professional registration/accreditation requirements will be recognised in the host country.

Under section 193 of the TEQSA Act, TEQSA is able to share higher education information with a body responsible for the regulation of an occupation in Australia. To date, TEQSA has endorsed sharing information with approximately 20 professional bodies, some of whom have jurisdiction outside Australia (for example The Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, and the Occupational Therapy Council (Australia and New Zealand)).

## Australian Education International

Australian Education International (AEI) is the federal government department responsible for international education. It works with the education sector and other government agencies to develop programs and policies to support student mobility and global exchange of knowledge. AEI's functions include:

- ▶ development of bilateral and free trade agreements to create opportunities for education exporters to expand into new markets
- ▶ provision of policy advice and intelligence on international education and research sectors
- ▶ fostering of relationships with international organisations to play a leading role in global and regional multilateral trade including UNESCO, APEC and EAS
- ▶ management of scholarships and fellowships
- ▶ management of programs to assist Australian students and staff to study or work overseas, and international students to study in Australia
- ▶ management of the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR) which supports student and labour market mobility through qualifications recognition, including professional recognition, and
- ▶ marketing and promotion of international education.

TEQSA uses AEI's Country Education Profiles to inform its intelligence about higher education accreditation and quality assurance arrangements in other countries, as well as information on overseas grading systems, academic years, admission requirements, institutions and programs.

TEQSA may also contact AEI Education and Research Counsellors located in overseas countries<sup>12</sup> prior to undertaking a regulatory assessment or site visit, in order to have information about the higher education sector in that country, including recent developments in government policy, and get information on third party partners

## Austrade

Austrade<sup>13</sup> (Australian Trade Commission) is responsible for the international marketing and promotion of Australian education and training. Through an international network, Austrade identifies opportunities and market intelligence which is disseminated to the Australian education sector to assist providers to make informed decisions about international relationships and business. A key priority is the development of transnational education opportunities in growth and emerging markets, especially in Asia.

TEQSA draws on this market intelligence for the countries in which Australian providers are active. TEQSA also ensures that Austrade staff are briefed on TEQSA's role, so that they can assure local government and quality assurance agencies of the extent to which Australian international education is monitored and quality assured.

## Other Regulatory/QA Agencies

TEQSA has developed memoranda of cooperation, arrangement and understanding with counterpart agencies in countries where Australian providers are active. Memoranda have been concluded with key agencies in the UK, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Japan, China and Papua New Guinea. Cooperative activities under these memoranda include the exchange of non-confidential information, and initiatives centred on reducing duplication for providers in meeting both domestic and foreign regulatory requirements. Further information about these memoranda is at: [teqsa.gov.au/about/international-engagement#C](https://teqsa.gov.au/about/international-engagement#C).

<sup>12</sup> [internationaleducation.gov.au/international-network/Pages/default.aspx](https://internationaleducation.gov.au/international-network/Pages/default.aspx)

<sup>13</sup> [austrade.gov.au/Education/Services/About-Austrade-Education#.U5qH6GV-\\_11](https://austrade.gov.au/Education/Services/About-Austrade-Education#.U5qH6GV-_11)

## International Agreements

TEQSA takes into account international agreements such as *The Washington Accord*, the agreement between bodies responsible for accrediting engineering degree programs. It recognises the substantial equivalency of programs accredited by those bodies and recommends that graduates of programs accredited by any of the signatory bodies be recognised by the other bodies as having met the academic requirements for entry to the practice of engineering. The Accord is available at: [washingtonaccord.org/Washington-Accord](http://washingtonaccord.org/Washington-Accord).

## International QA/Accreditation

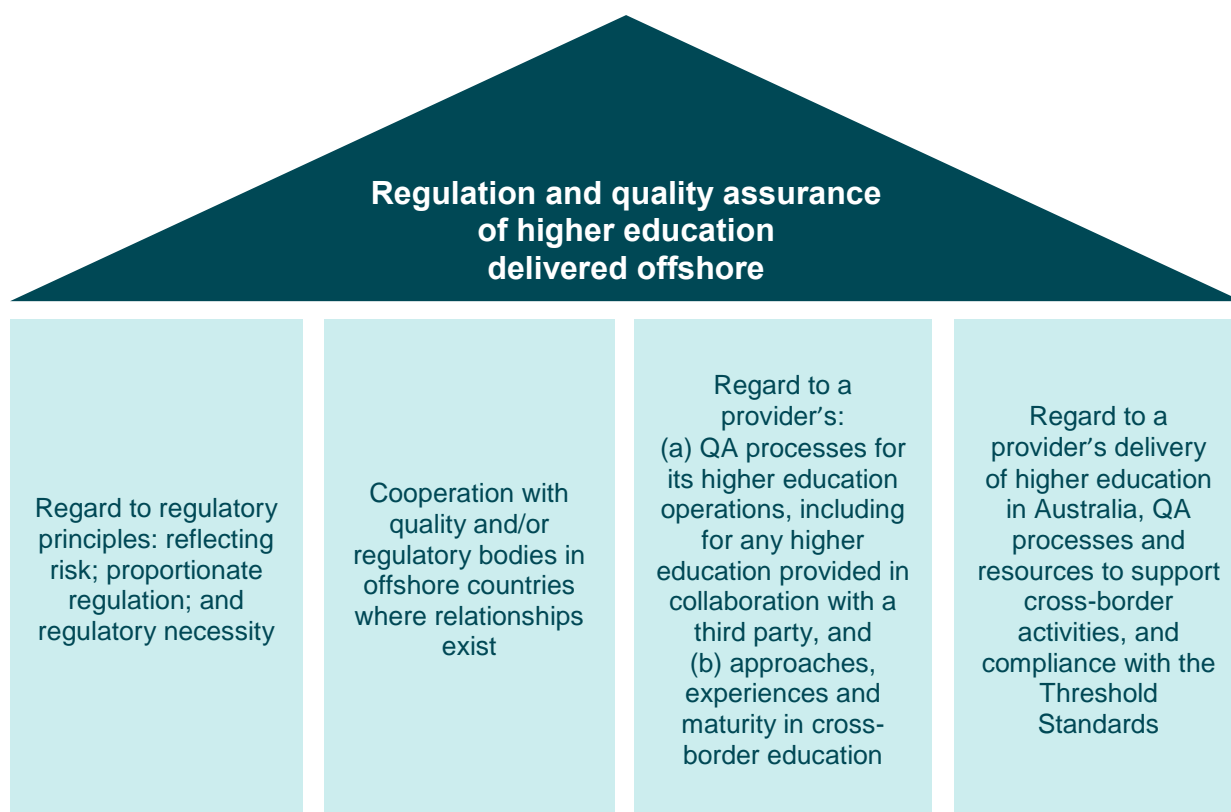
Some providers gain global recognition of the quality of their higher education provision in Australia and offshore through accreditation from an international body. TEQSA takes this recognition into account when reviewing offshore provision of higher education awards. Two such bodies whose accreditation is well regarded are AACSB International and EFMD.

## 3.2 CBHE criteria, methods, or procedures in place

TEQSA's *International Strategy 2013–15* aims to ensure that overseas governments and students view registration by TEQSA as a mark of quality in Australian higher education. Through the Strategy, TEQSA commits to delivering “a rigorous approach to offshore provision, including overseas site visits when necessary, and developing cooperative relationships with overseas quality assurance agencies and governments regarding offshore issues”.

There are four main pillars underpinning TEQSA's approach to the regulation and quality assurance of cross-border operations, as reflected in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2: TEQSA's regulation and quality assurance of offshore higher education**



The Threshold Standards include a range of provisions relevant to a provider's offshore operations. These have been identified and grouped according to seven high level themes, outlined at **Attachment 1**. These high level themes are split into 18 areas that may be relevant to explore when assessing offshore operations against the Threshold Standards.

These areas are applied using TEQSA's three regulatory principles – regulatory necessity, reflecting risk, and proportionality. The nature of issues to explore and evidence requirements will vary depending on the context and circumstances of each provider.

The implementation of the approach to regulation of offshore provision of regulated higher education awards is guided by the following factors:

1. TEQSA will seek to protect the interests of both current and prospective students who are undertaking, or are seeking to undertake, higher education in any location outside Australia.
2. A provider's offshore delivery will be regulated having regard to:
  - a. its compliance with the Threshold Standards, including its ability to meet the standards in relation to delivery of higher education within Australia
  - b. the scale and scope of offshore higher education operations conducted (for example the number of offshore locations, the range of third parties involved, and number of discipline areas in which courses of study are delivered offshore).
3. Where possible, TEQSA will use information from other quality assurance or regulatory bodies in a host country to inform its regulatory decision-making.
4. TEQSA will seek evidence that student learning outcomes for courses delivered offshore are equivalent to those for the same course delivered by the provider at any other location.
5. If a provider with self-accrediting authority is delivering courses leading to a regulated higher education award offshore, TEQSA will typically include at least one of these courses of study in the sample for assessment as part of a renewal of registration process.
6. Subject to the provisions of its Public Disclosure Policy, TEQSA will avoid the publication of information that may unnecessarily prejudice a provider's ability to operate in an offshore jurisdiction.
7. TEQSA's primary relationship is with the higher education provider. TEQSA will take into account any known sensitivities involved in partnerships or other third party arrangements for offshore operations, and will normally use a provider as the intermediary for communication with a partner or third party about TEQSA's regulatory processes, and when making arrangements to visit the partner/third party, when a visit is deemed necessary.

Regulatory assessment processes for offshore operations will differ depending on the circumstances. For example, TEQSA may assess offshore delivery against the Threshold Standards through of the following regulatory processes:

- ▶ assessment of an application for registration or renewal of registration
- ▶ assessment of an application for accreditation/renewal of accreditation of a course of study
- ▶ a compliance or accreditation assessment resulting from a material change notification
- ▶ a compliance or accreditation assessment resulting from the identification of risks.

The operations of a higher education provider can be assessed when their TEQSA registration is being considered for renewal. In the case of providers that do not have authority to self-accredit their own courses, an existing course being delivered offshore can be assessed at the time it is submitted for renewal of accreditation, or when a new course is submitted for initial accreditation by TEQSA. Approvals can be for up to seven years. TEQSA may also assess offshore operations where there is evidence of risk of non-compliance with the Threshold Standards prior to a renewal of accreditation or renewal of registration process.

### **3.3 Role of international guidelines (OECD-UNESCO Guidelines and the ESG) on national approaches to quality assurance of CBHE**

#### **Analysis of the impact and use of international guidelines on quality assurance mechanisms of CBHE at national level**

TEQSA's operational guidelines relating to the assessment of offshore higher education awards were developed and informed by international guidelines and resources, including:

- ▶ UNESCO/OECD, 2005 *Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education*, viewed 16 April 2013,
- ▶ Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK (QAA), 2013 *Quality Code – Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*, viewed 9 April 2013,

#### **Are the guidelines known and used? What is their impact on national criteria?**

TEQSA is required to regulate offshore higher education activities against the Threshold Standards within the Higher Education Standards Framework. These standards remain the primary focus of TEQSA's assessments. However, the international guidelines mentioned above informed the development of TEQSA's internal operational guidelines for regulating offshore awards, for example in relation to framing questions and areas of enquiry for regulatory assessments.

The UNESCO/OECD Guidelines are closely aligned to TEQSA's objects to protect students from low-quality provision, and provide a useful reference for assessing TEQSA's approach to cross-border activities. Further, the Quality Assurance Agency's Quality Code is closely aligned to many of the Threshold Standards.

# Chapter 4 – Main obstacles and challenges of CBHE and its quality assurance

## 4.1 For agencies

There are a range of challenges for TEQSA in regulating cross-border education by Australian higher education providers. Some of the main challenges relate to the following:

- ▶ difficulties in determining whether student learning outcomes for courses delivered outside of Australia are equivalent to those for the same course of study when delivered by the higher education provider, as required by the Threshold Standards
- ▶ obtaining accurate information about a provider's full range of cross-border activities
- ▶ the understanding by overseas stakeholders (governments, regulatory/quality assurance agencies) of Australia's higher education regulation and quality assurance framework
- ▶ lack of recognition of Australian awards in some countries (for example in China)
- ▶ understanding of legislative and regulatory provisions in different countries
- ▶ resources to undertake thorough assessments of cross-border activities, including site visits
- ▶ language and cultural differences, which affect interactions including interpretation of documentation; interviews with stakeholders; and effective liaison between agencies, and
- ▶ access to partner and delivery sites (and thus physical and learning facilities).

## 4.2 For institutions

There is a range of overarching risks and challenges associated with cross-border operations that are documented and applicable to Australian providers. Those highlighted by McBurnie and Ziguras (2011:21) include:

- ▶ difficulties in costing offshore operations
- ▶ risks associated with changing government/regulatory requirements in the host country (cost of meeting both Australian and host country regulatory/qa requirements)
- ▶ risks in funnelling staff time and other resources away from education responsibilities in Australia; with a potential reduction in the quality of offerings onshore
- ▶ TNE offered may be of poor quality, using poorly structured, outdated curriculum materials without proper pedagogical support (e.g. sending country lecturer's PowerPoint slides as subject notes, without any further elaboration or context)
- ▶ Imported curriculum may be culturally inappropriate without appropriate adaptation.

In 2010, AUQA undertook an analysis of its audit reports from 2002 relating to cross-border activities, and identified a number of areas that had been noted within the reports as requiring improvement. These included:

- ▶ inappropriate arrangements with third parties, due to inadequate due diligence processes and/or poor business planning and management practices (including a lack of monitoring contract and agreement provisions)
- ▶ a limited number of personnel being involved in the decision-making and review processes of the contracts and agreements
- ▶ in some cases, poor control over the standard of teaching and assessment
- ▶ the capacity of higher education providers to monitor the accuracy of marketing information provided to stakeholders when in a language other than English
- ▶ appropriate verification of original enrolment application documentation

- ▶ consistency in determination of advanced standing for enrolling students given differences in national higher education systems
- ▶ maintenance of English language entrance standards
- ▶ performance appraisal and support for staff to internationalise course content
- ▶ staff support and professional development related to cultural awareness
- ▶ securing appropriately qualified and experienced staff offshore
- ▶ reconsideration of pedagogical models to place greater emphasis on equivalence of learning outcomes
- ▶ adequacy of assessment feedback to students, where assessment is undertaken by a third party/partner (noting that moderation processes do not always account for this issue)
- ▶ access to library electronic resources for students studying outside Australia, and
- ▶ location-specific pastoral support for students.

(Stella, A. 2011:59–76).

### **Support needs: what are institutions' expectations towards agencies? Data to be taken from the survey and interviews**

Because of the mature nature of Australian provider's offshore operations, and TEQSA's relativeness newness, Australian higher education providers have not been very explicit in their expectations of TEQSA. However, through discussions with providers, the following issues have been raised:

- ▶ mutual recognition of regulatory approaches between countries to reduce regulatory burden of providers
- ▶ collaboration with other agencies in order to reduce documentation required for regulatory processes
- ▶ clarity of TEQSA's approach to regulating offshore provision (refer to TEQSA information sheet at: [teqsa.gov.au/for-providers/provider-resources](https://teqsa.gov.au/for-providers/provider-resources)).

# Chapter 5 – Good practice examples

## Case study 1 – Curtin University of Technology: Off-shore delivery via third party collaboration

*“Starting is easier, management of the partnership is harder, but termination and teach out is the most difficult aspect.”*

*Dean, International Development*

### About the provider

Curtin University of Technology (Curtin) is Western Australia’s largest university, offering higher education academic programs from AQF levels 7 to 10. Curtin’s main campus is in Perth. The University has several other locations and educational centres in regional Western Australia.

Curtin also has a campus in Sydney and two overseas campuses - in Sarawak, East Malaysia (since 1999) and in Singapore (since 2008). The Sydney and Singapore campuses, and Curtin College, the University’s pathway college, are operated by Navitas Limited.

The University has four faculties (Business, Health Sciences, Humanities, Science and Engineering) and the Centre for Aboriginal Studies. The faculties are headed by a Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC). The leadership team assisting the Vice-Chancellor includes four Deputy Vice-Chancellors (DVC) with portfolios covering academic services; research and development; international; and education. An Associate DVC has responsibility for quality enhancement within the academic services portfolio; and there is a Vice President for Corporate Services and a Vice President for Corporate Relations and Development.<sup>14</sup>

Total student numbers in 2013 were 38,067 EFTSL, of which about 32% were international students and approximately 15% were taught in cooperation with third party partners in an offshore location. Curtin has the fourth largest international student population of any Australian higher education provider.

The University has established and consolidated partnerships with a range of partners. In 2013 it delivered internationally through a range of providers located in Singapore, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mauritius, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, at AQF levels 7 to 9.

At the time of the case study, the University supported a total of ten third party partnerships, with three of these onshore and seven offshore.

As the large majority of Curtin’s off-shore delivery involves collaboration with third parties, this case study focuses on Curtin’s institutional systems, policies and practices with these partners.

### Strategic interests in third party collaboration in teaching and learning

*Our unique network of international partnerships will provide invaluable opportunities for developing cross-cultural awareness through International Engagement and Student Mobility Programs. Curtin’s Strategic Plan 2013-2017*

Curtin’s first offshore education collaboration started in 1986 with the Marketing Institute of Singapore. Since that time, there has been significant growth in the number of programs offered

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<sup>14</sup> Curtin’s organisational structure is at: <http://about.curtin.edu.au/organisational-profile.cfm>



through a collaborative arrangement. Growth in the earlier years was largely opportunistic and pursued at faculty and school levels. As its experience in collaborative partnerships developed, Curtin adopted a consolidated approach to its transnational education strategy to ensure that arrangements through partnerships are scalable, sustainable and not fragmented. As a result, Curtin has significantly rationalised its offshore partnerships, from a high of 31 partners in the past to just seven in 2013. Programs delivered by third party collaborative partners cover a range of discipline areas, including Commerce, Engineering, Health, Arts IT and Education.

Curtin is discerning in its choice of partners. While capacity building is important, sustainability and rewards hold equal importance.

Curtin has identified a number of benefits arising from its partnership arrangements, including: opening up new markets; opportunities for international learning experiences for students; development of discipline knowledge and expertise; specialised instruction; niche program development; internationalisation of the curriculum; expansion of global networks; and improving networks for research and teaching.

### **The third party model**

Curtin's Collaborative Award procedures provide that at least one third of the course should be taught by Curtin, unless a lesser amount is approved by the DVC, Education.

Formal agreements with collaborators stipulate that Curtin has control over all academic matters, including enrolment and entry standards (including competence in English), academic content of courses, course and subject requirements and standards, assignments, student progress and assessment, and any rules and regulations relating to these matters.

### **Development, governance and management of third party arrangements**

Responsibility for the management of the selection of partners and the educational arrangements rests with the DVC (International) in association with the faculty PVCs, and assisted by the Deans (International) and other senior staff.

Curtin's Collaborative Education Services (CES) (International) Policy and Procedures cover all aspects of initiating, operating, reviewing and terminating offshore programs. The policy and procedures are supported by a comprehensive set of forms and templates to guide each stage and to support close monitoring of contractual obligations and policy implementation.

### **Selection and establishment**

A proposal to establish new programs with a new or existing partner may be initiated by a Faculty Dean, International or nominee in collaboration with the Heads of School. An approval to negotiate must be given by Faculty PVC and DVC International before detailed negotiations proceed. This involves an initial background check on the proposed partner. If approved, a thorough due diligence check is then undertaken, which may involve external assessment reports on the prospective partner's financial sustainability and professional reputation.

Suitable partners are selected based on a range of criteria, including: higher education experience; geographical location; access to markets; numbers, experience and qualifications of teaching staff; governance systems and processes (including quality management and risk management); reputation; financial capacity; teaching spaces and IT facilities; library facilities; local regulatory history and degree of fit with Curtin's strategic mission and vision. Important considerations also include Curtin's ability to deliver the course at faculty level, and whether the potential partner has existing partners.

Partner suitability is also assessed based on ensuring that the partner, and its associates, meets the 'fit and proper person test' as prescribed in the ESOS Act.<sup>15</sup>

Most formal partnership agreements are for a five-year term. A new risk assessment is undertaken of existing partners prior to making a decision whether or not to renew or amend the existing agreement, or in some cases, not to pursue a new agreement.

### **Review and evaluation**

Curtin reviews its collaborative programs annually. Faculties are responsible for ensuring that the review is conducted with the offshore partner(s), based on a standard template covering issues such as: actions undertaken from the last review; admission and enrolments; student performance; graduating students; operational and administrative issues; and marketing. Formal minutes of each annual review are prepared, together with an updated action plan allocating responsibilities for agreed tasks.

Each annual review process is overseen by Curtin International in accordance with University policy and procedures. Quarterly reports on progress against actions identified within the Annual Review are provided by faculties to Curtin International.

In addition to the annual reviews, periodic site audits of all collaborator operations are carried out as directed by the DVC International. For existing partners, site visits are normally conducted each 3-5 years. The review process takes a risk management approach and involves interviews with relevant Curtin and partner institution teaching staff, and students. The process considers whether Curtin and its offshore partners are complying with contractual obligations; policy obligations are being met; promotion of Curtin and Curtin's programs is satisfactory; the partner's business and educational activities remain complementary to Curtin activities; any emerging strategic concerns; and that continuous improvement measures are in place.

The site audit process includes the following scope:

- site assessment criteria include such issues as adequacy of classrooms and IT facilities; library and student support services; and exam security
- standards and equivalency in admission standards and assessment between offshore and onshore students
- analysis of data including student enrolment, pass rates, student feedback and financial statements
- financial returns to Curtin and three-year trend
- academic governance structures, including line of accountability and committee structures.

Criteria and performance measures used for the site audits are informed by the Higher Education Threshold Standards, and the process is supported by detailed templates, checklists and forms to guide interviews and report formats. Formal agreement provisions include obligations on the partner to advise Curtin if their situation changes during the contract.

Each course at Curtin is subject to a separate comprehensive course review every five years. This review considers different delivery modes and performance across different locations, including offshore locations where courses are offered in partnership with third parties.

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<sup>15</sup> While the ESOS Act does not apply to offshore education, it is deemed to be good practice for international education, so therefore is used as a reference point.

## ***Exiting and termination***

Curtin's CES procedures include detailed termination and exit processes involving approval from the International Office and legal advice about contractual obligations and options for termination/non-renewal. The faculty works with the partner to develop a teach-out Study Plan for affected students, using guidelines included in the policy. At the initial stages of a confirmed termination process, students and their parents are invited to an information session and advised of the teach-out timeframe. This is supplemented by written communications including a customised study plan for each student with options to complete the course either by remaining at the partner, through online delivery, and/or by transferring to Curtin's home campus.

If students are unable to complete units of study by the nominated timeframe, suitable alternative arrangements are identified by the faculty and the partner wherever possible. A formal Deed of Termination is executed which contains details of the exit strategy. Yearly progress reports against the exit strategy are submitted to Curtin International and following completion, a termination checklist and supporting documentation are also submitted.

## ***Equivalence of standards***

In addition to the processes outlined above, Curtin has a range of measures in place to assure equivalence of standards across programs delivered by offshore partners, including in relation to learning outcomes, assessments, and graduate attributes. Examples of measures include:

- close liaison by Curtin's subject controllers with teaching staff in other locations and the provision of marking guides, assessment items and exams
- moderation visits
- boards of examiners
- consideration of academic outcomes (including comparability of pass rates, distribution of grades, graduation rates)
- approval of necessary qualifications and experience of all lecturers or tutors appointed by the partner to deliver Curtin courses
- identification of both a Curtin and a partner coordinator to ensure facilities and services are of an appropriate standard
- access to Curtin subject controllers and/or program managers by partner teaching staff and Curtin enrolled students
- evaluation of academic governance, teaching staff and qualifications; host country accreditations; teaching facilities (including library, IT and internet bandwidth); and previous experience of the partner in teaching similar programs and levels prior to the partnership
- visits by faculty administrative and/or academic staff to offshore locations at least annually
- review of student feedback.

Students undertaking a course at partner institutions are enrolled as Curtin students, and follow the University's enrolment and other academic policies governing their course. Students in partner institutions have access to learning resources through the University's Learning Management System, and to online materials through the University's library system. A comprehensive A-Z guide for offshore students is available at:

<http://international.curtin.edu.au/offshore-programs.cfm>. A hard copy of this guide is provided to all students enrolled with third party providers offshore.

## ***Risks and vulnerabilities; successes and challenges***

Curtin's 25 years' experience in offshore partnerships have resulted in the development of strong governance and quality assurance processes that are articulated through a comprehensive set of policies, procedures and supporting templates and checklists. While these documents could be viewed as complex, the University's practical experience is that maintaining

rigorous and consistent processes for developing, managing and terminating offshore third party partnerships actually supports a level of flexibility in the approach taken to each partnership.

The University views as particularly important to its success with third party partnerships:

- robust partner selection processes, including detailed due diligence and market analysis
- very close monitoring of stringent contractual obligations relating to quality assurance and financial arrangements, and
- effective working relationships and dialogue between the central areas within the DVC (International) portfolio and the faculties.

Curtin reinforced the difficulties associated with ceasing or terminating a partnership agreement, particularly in effectively managing teach-out arrangements. Examples where challenges had been experienced included teaching out a large course involving over 350 students.

The University also considers that having current and sound knowledge of the legal and regulatory environment in the host offshore country can be challenging. Although partners provide advice and intelligence, in recent times Curtin has also taken greater responsibility for checking and obtaining information about the regulatory environment (for example through independent legal advice and/or government and regulatory authorities in some countries).

## Case study 2 –RMIT: an offshore branch campus model

### About the provider

Established in 1887 as the Working Men's College and obtaining University status in 1992, RMIT is a global university of technology and design. The University has an international reputation in professional and vocational education and outcome-oriented research. RMIT has three campuses in Melbourne, two campuses in Vietnam, a centre in Barcelona, and a number of research centres around the world. RMIT offers undergraduate through to PhD programs with partners in Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Belgium, Spain and Germany, and has research and industry partnerships on every continent.

### *International and domestic operations*

RMIT was one of the first Australian universities to extend its operations to locations outside Australia: adopting an explicit international strategy incorporating the delivery of teaching programs in Australia and internationally; an education abroad program where students spend part of their course studying overseas; active participation by staff in international teaching and research; and an internationalised curriculum.

In 2012, RMIT marked 25 years of education partnership with its major partner in Singapore, the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM Global). This partnership commenced in 1987 as an arrangement for the delivery of RMIT undergraduate business programs, with a move into postgraduate program delivery and undergraduate program offerings in other disciplines developing later. In subsequent years RMIT also developed a number of other partnership programs in China and Hong Kong, Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, Europe and Indonesia.

In 2001 RMIT International University Vietnam, an accredited campus of RMIT in Ho Chi Minh City, became the first foreign-owned private university in Vietnam. In the same year, the RMIT had one of the first non-Chinese degrees to be granted official Chinese Government approval for delivery through a partner institution in China.

By end 2013, total enrolments stood at 82,229 which consisted of 59,313 in higher education; 6,090 in Open Universities Australia; 16,200 in VET; and 626 in Foundation Studies. Of the total

enrolments, RMIT had 10,800 international students enrolled in Australia – 16% of the Australian campus student population – and approximately 17,600 students enrolled outside Australia - 10,800 enrolled in programs with partners and 6,800 at RMIT Vietnam.

In June 2013, RMIT established a site in Barcelona to build its European postgraduate, research and student mobility activities. It also recently developed an education partnership with Universitas Pelita Harapan for the delivery of joint programs in Jakarta, Indonesia.

## Strategic interests in cross border arrangements in teaching and learning

RMIT has the largest transnational footprint of all Australian universities with its campuses in Vietnam and through partnerships in key cities, especially across Asia. RMIT's transnational profile is largely at the under-graduate level, dominated by business programs, with both university and non-university partners.

A major characteristic of RMIT's international activities that differs from the industry trend is the balance between enrolments with RMIT in Australia and outside of Australia. RMIT has more international students enrolled outside Australia, compared with those international students enrolled at RMIT campuses in Melbourne. As a consequence, supporting RMIT's transnational education engagement has become an embedded feature of the University's ethos.

The Red Paper which accompanies the University Strategic Plan, *Transforming the Future: Strategic Plan RMIT 2015*, notes: "RMIT has been concentrating its offshore education partnerships in Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Shanghai. There is room to plan for new nodes for educational partnerships for the next five years, as well as developing plans for those where RMIT is already established".

Transnational initiatives play a significant role in achieving RMIT's global aspirations and, as such, transnational education is a key part of the University's core business and central to its strategic planning. Goal 1 of the University Plan 2013-2015 *RMIT 2015: Transforming the Future* reflects this when it states; "Strengthen our global reputation, by extending our physical and virtual presence through international campuses and partnerships". The overall thrust of the University strategy is integrated global growth in transnational activity, in selected key cities, delivering diversified offshore education in the University's high impact areas.

## Partner or third party provider model

Partnered delivery of coursework award agreements enables RMIT to deliver programs in conjunction with a partner institution under third party provider arrangements. Under these arrangements, students enrol with RMIT and receive an RMIT award upon completion of the program. In some cases programs have been established that allow students to undertake programs in which graduates are entitled to awards from both RMIT and the partner institution. The partner generally provides the teaching and learning facilities, and acts as a local marketing and admissions centre. In addition, partner staff normally contribute to teaching and assessment, although RMIT staff must, according to RMIT policy, contribute a minimum of 25% of the teaching delivery at bachelor level and 50% at masters level. Assessment tasks marked by partner staff are always moderated by RMIT academic staff.

Transnational education partnerships entered into by RMIT may be with private education institutions (who may not have award granting powers on their own), universities or colleges. Partners may also be non-academic institutions such as global enterprises and non-government organisations, whose partnership with RMIT involves provision of education and training for their staff, recruits and/or community members.

Processes in place to ensure the equivalence of Standards are discussed below.

## **Development, governance and management of cross border education arrangements**

### ***Overview***

RMIT's offshore partnerships are governed through contractual arrangements between the parties and associated provisions and structures.

Contractual arrangements are managed through Joint Management Committees (JMC), which include senior representatives from RMIT and the partner institution. The JMC provides direction setting for the partnership over a 1-5 year term and explores opportunities to strengthen and grow the partnership. The JMC also makes decisions on key issues and disputes, and provides a forum to discuss, review and agree on key academic, management and contractual matters.

For each program, RMIT appoints an Academic Program Manager from the relevant academic College with responsibility for ensuring that the offshore program delivery is managed in accordance with RMIT's academic policies and teaching standards. The daily contract management is undertaken by RMIT's International Partnerships team, in close collaboration with partner staff and key RMIT stakeholders across the academic Colleges, the DVC Academic and the University's quality assurance, risk management and finance offices.

### ***Selection and establishment***

There is no single approach to sourcing opportunities for offshore program delivery. Rather, opportunities can be identified via Academic Colleges, through existing academic staff connections in particular regions of the world, or through staff from the International Portfolio actively prospecting for new locations and partners for program delivery.

When a possible partner has been identified a strategic assessment is performed to ascertain suitability with RMIT's aspirations and activities and detailed due diligence is undertaken to check the quality and appropriateness of the partner. RMIT's policy framework and internal governance processes ensure that partner arrangements, and all program delivery, meet the requirements of relevant legislative frameworks at the point of partner and/or program approval. Key areas involved include the DVC (Academic), the Academic Board, the International Partnerships & Development group and the Global Quality, Regulation & Compliance Group.

### ***Exiting and termination***

Agreements and services delivered through each partnership are evaluated and reviewed to ensure alignment with RMIT's academic standards and strategic direction. This provides a robust basis for any decision made to terminate or continue with the agreement. Review processes examine compliance with the agreement, offshore program review, quality assurance and continuous improvement, financial viability, process and outcome evaluation, relevance to the market and industry, and competition. When decisions are taken to end an offshore program, detailed exit plans are developed and implemented, covering teach out arrangements, communications and contractual arrangements.

### ***Equivalence of standards***

RMIT University ensures that all programs delivered through a partnership arrangement meet the requirements of the TEQSA Act, the Threshold Standards and the AQF. Particular regard is given to section 26 of the TEQSA Act that requires higher education providers, when offering or

conferring an award wholly or partly by another entity, to 'ensure that the other entity provides the course of study consistently with the Threshold Standards'.

RMIT achieves this through discussions with partners to verify and clarify that responsibility for key quality assurance activities are in place, including the addition of contract Annexures outlining specific requirements on Program Quality Review, Student Services and Library Services. Host country legislation and cultural context is taken into consideration on a case-by-case basis. Quality assurance activities are performed as outlined above, and regular advice is provided to partners to ensure equivalence is maintained.

Quality assurance processes utilised to ensure academic standards are equivalent are evidenced through compliance with relevant strategic directions, policies, procedures and guidelines and external legislative frameworks outline above. Comparability, on the other hand, allows for contextualisation and customisation to take account of local factors and to meet the needs of specific student cohorts. Customisation similarly aligns the learning design of a course offering and the media used for presentation of materials with the students' profile to promote effective learning.

Data collated through a Program Annual Review is used to ensure the University is delivering an equivalent and comparable program at every location and through each mode of delivery.

### **Risks and vulnerabilities; successes and challenges**

RMIT has extensive experience in delivering transnational education which enables it to identify and respond to risks involved in cross-border higher education delivery, along with developing institutional understanding of the vulnerabilities and challenges involved. The points below capture some of RMIT's key risk mitigation strategies and achievements.

- RMIT's international Memoranda of Understanding are designed to contribute to the development of the University's collaborations internationally as are the more specific agreements directing particular activities. The International Partnerships and Collaborations Policy provides the institutional framework for strategic partner selection and due diligence in regard to specific international activities.
- Regular monitoring of legislative change and University impact is undertaken by the Governance & Planning portfolio, allowing for dissemination to stakeholders of key information and the ability to proactively maintain both compliance with legislation and effective program delivery. Ongoing contract management and established relationships with partners ensures that appropriate action occurs when policy or regulatory changes require changes to contractual arrangements.
- RMIT's established base of activity in Asia provides extensive experience in tailoring curriculum to the Asian market, and a strong basis for the needs of other markets.
- Existing partnership management arrangements offer further opportunity to address matters regarding the in-country relevance of RMIT programs, and new program offerings. Detailed market and demand analysis happens on an ongoing basis and is undertaken for approval of new and renewed offerings. This helps to ensure that appropriate price points are established, reflecting ever-changing market conditions and demand for specific program offerings.

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## Attachment 1: TEQSA's Assessment Themes for Regulating Cross-Border Education

