

2008 ISANA National Conference

Conference Presentation

“Integration & Interaction: It’s also for QA regulators”

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The ISANA Conference theme of “Promoting Integration and Interaction” could be as relevant to those charged with the responsibility of Quality Assuring international education as it is to the education providers who deliver it.

Increasingly, international students coming to Australia engage with a number of education providers and education sectors, undertaking pathways from exchange, school or ELICOS student through VET providers and then to the Higher Education sector.

Education providers have, in recent years, increasingly responded to student’s needs, with an increasing range of multi-sector providers, offering ELICOS and Foundation Studies, or pathway programs from Certificate courses through to higher degrees.

Across Victoria, 70% of international students are enrolled with a CRICOS registered provider offering programs in more than one sector. Several Victorian TAFE Institutes have students enrolled across up to five of the eight sectors of international education:

1. ELICOS
2. Foundation Studies
3. Higher Education
4. Non-Award programs
5. School programs
6. Trans-national Education
7. Vocational Education
8. Exchange Students

Despite this growing integration in the sectoral structures of international education, until recently government regulatory and quality assurance arrangements have largely remained unchanged, sectoral and unintegrated.

Australian State and Territory arrangements for accrediting courses, registering providers and providing quality assurance protection to students have evolved from very distinct, Even the ESOS Act, and all the protection mechanisms that flow from it such as AEI, the National Code and PRISMS, fails to cover all international students in Australia.

Tens of thousands of students undertaking ELICOS and short courses on Visitor and Working Holiday maker visas, and international exchange students, are neither protected by the ESOS framework nor counted by the PRISMS system.

In a number of Australian states and territories, under the one ESOS umbrella, there is an array of up to 5 different regulatory agencies responsible for quality assuring government schools and private schools, TAFE and private VET providers and Higher Education.

This fragmented approach means that providers of international education & training face:

- Different processes for registration for courses delivered by the same institution
- Differing interpretations of ESOS and National Code requirements in each sector
- Unnecessarily duplicated registration and audit requirements, and
- Some international courses and programs with no minimum national standards.

For international students, this fragmented regulatory environment is worse than incomprehensibly confusing. The lack of integration in quality assurance arrangements presents risks to international students because it:

- entrenches gaps in consumer protection - with some international students receiving adequate ESOS consumer protection but others - such as international exchange students - lacking any quality assurance or consumer protection arrangements
- limits or prevents the transfer of 'best practice' knowledge in the care and management of international student programs between sectors.

The VRQA

The Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority came into existence on 1 July 2007 - the same day, coincidentally, as the new ESOS National Code 2007. The VRQA was forged from the amalgamation of four components:

- The Victorian Qualifications Authority - itself an innovative body established five years earlier to accredit all qualifications and courses at Higher Education, TAFE and Senior Secondary delivered in Victoria,
- Components of the Office of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE) which registered VET and Higher Education providers and accredited post-secondary qualifications and courses,
- the Registered Schools Board, which had registered all non-government schools and approved non-government schools for CRICOS
- components of the Department of Education & Training that accredited government schools for CRICOS and registered International Student Exchange Organisations.

For the first time in a large jurisdiction, a single, integrated government quality assurance and regulatory agency would have responsibility for:

- accrediting all qualifications and all education & training courses for overseas students (save pre-school) and
- registering all education & training providers - more than 3,700 (including home schools but not pre-schools).

The VRQA is a statutory authority established under the Victorian *Education & Training Reform Act 2006* with a Board of 13 members appointed because of their expertise in education and training.

The VRQA is accountable to the Minister for Education (for schools) and the Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation (for tertiary providers).

The Minister for Education outlined the purpose of the VRQA in the 2nd Reading Speech, that the Authority would be responsible for a the accreditation and quality assurance support of a seamless education and training system that can deliver a variety of pathways for young people as well as lifelong education and training for the community.

The then Minister for Education, the Hon. Lynn Kosky, stated that the VRQA was to deliver “...*learning and teaching free of antiquated compliance structures ... a regulatory approach that upholds standards and protects learners.*”

Integrated Approach for International Education Across All Sectors

There are more than 148,000 international students, ranging from 6 year olds in primary school to mature age PhD scholars, enrolled in courses ranging from four weeks to four years. The establishment of the VRQA’s International Unit integrates the registration of all education and training providers seeking to deliver courses to international students, and international student exchange organisations.

The VRQA International Unit delivers a range of benefits to students and providers through integration:

- a single focussed unit responsible for advice on international education registration and quality assurance requirements across all sectors,
- provision of coordinated International Education Professional Development programs - in cooperation with ISANA and other organisations - for all staff in education & training providers and student exchange organisations,
- integrated management of complaints from international students and CRICOS provider incidents (in conjunction with DEEWR),
- a unified voice for all 8 international education sectors in Victoria in other state and national education industry forums,
- enhanced operational integration of international education with other government agencies such as Department of Immigration & Citizenship,
- enhanced care arrangements for under 18 students through an integration of minimum standards across all sectors, and transfer of ‘best practice’ benchmarks from schools and exchange sectors to VET & Higher Ed sectors, and
- benefits to smaller sectors - ELICOS, Foundation Studies, Non-Award providers and exchange organisations benefit through greater integration with schools, VET and higher education.

Case Study: Post Secondary Providers Benefit from Integrating with Schools Sector

Many VET and Higher Education providers have a small % of their international students who are under 18 - and many of these providers have found it difficult to fully meet their obligations under National Code Standard 5 because of their lack of experience with younger international students.

Ensuring education and training providers meet their obligations regarding accommodation, support and general welfare to under -18 students is a key priority for the VRQA.

Through cross-sectoral Professional Development seminars and integration through the VRQA, post-secondary providers have access to a range of expert advice and resource material on 'best-practice' arrangements for under-18 students.

The integration of expert advice from the schools sector has also benefitted a number of International Student Exchange Organisations.

The Next Step in QA Integration - Victorian State Register

The VRQA has received funding to build a comprehensive new electronic VRQA State Register of all education and training providers and accredited qualifications, as part of the Victorian Government's Skills Statement, *Securing Jobs for your Future: Skills for Victoria*

The objectives of the State Register are to:

- Allow the VRQA to maintain data on accredited courses and qualifications; registered training organisations and their scope of registration (schools, VET and higher education).
- Ensure the public availability of meaningful and accurate information about registered education and training in Victoria.
- Ensure the VRQA can record its decisions in relation to its functions

The public will be able to view accurate and meaningful information on approved providers, qualifications & the units required to complete them.

The VRQA will be able to record and monitor performance outcomes for providers, results of audits, home schooling.

International Education providers across all sectors will be able to be able to lodge electronic applications for registration or accreditation, receive electronic acknowledgement and view the status of their applications.

The VRQA will be able to assess applications and record decisions. Auditors will be able to input audit results directly and providers will be able to view their audit and review reports & status.

Those who deliver programs to international students - schools, vocational colleges, ELICOS and Foundation programs, higher education providers and exchange organisations will all benefit from the new electronic VRQA State Register.

Conclusion - Working in Partnership with ISANA

A number of major TAFE colleges in Melbourne have international students enrolled in:

- Senior secondary school programs
- ELICOS & Foundation Studies programs
- VET courses
- Higher Education courses

Potentially these organisations may also have international students undertaking other Non-Award courses such as pilot training and may have international exchange organisations.

The major theme of this conference and much of the ongoing work of ISANA is to foster the benefits that flow to education institutions from integrating their various international programs more effectively with their delivery to domestic students.

There are very significant benefits to the institution, the domestic and the international students when this occurs effectively - as this conference has showcased.

However, integration is also for regulators. The same large TAFE College delivering across six or seven sectors of international education benefits when there is a single integrated quality assurance regulator for international education - and again these benefits flow to both the institution and to its entire member - students and staff.

Given the VRQA is a bold experiment in cross-sectoral QA in education & training - it is important to share its development with key stakeholder associations such as ISANA, and to seek your support and cooperation as we work to further improve the quality of international education and training.

In developing our proposal to deliver quality Professional Development seminars in 2009 for staff working in international education across all sectors, the VRQA sought to do this in partnership with those associations already providing many of these services to their members.

I have been delighted by the highly professional and cooperative approach of ISANA both at the national and Victorian level - and the VRQA looks forward to working closely with ISANA to deliver a significant PD program next year. In doing so, I should stress that the VRQA is very mindful that we do not want to duplicate or to damage the current programs delivered very effectively to members of associations such as ISANA.

Rather, we want to complement and enhance them by using the regulatory authority of the VRQA to reach out to the international student coordinators and staff in the sectors who are largely unrepresented in our current association structures - most particularly in private VET provider colleges. We believe that the inclusion of staff from all sectors serving international students - including international student exchange organisations - will benefit us individually and collectively. There are new perspectives, and significant best practice approaches developed within sectors that, when shared across all of us, will benefit our staff, our providers and ultimately our students.

2007-2008 was the establishment year for the VRQA. 2008-2009 is now well underway and is the year we look forward to working with you as individuals, as providers and with ISANA as an organisation.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with a summary of the VRQA's work in integrating international education QA services.

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