



TERMS OF REFERENCE

ASQA Strategic Review: Online learning in the VET sector

As outlined in the Regulatory Strategy 2020-22, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is undertaking a strategic review of online learning in the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been a major catalyst for training providers across the world. Australia's VET and international education sectors faced major disruption, and many providers have shifted to online delivery to continue training while keeping staff and students safe. Between March and July 2020, more than 1000 providers—including around 450 Australian education providers approved to teach overseas students known as Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) providers—advised ASQA that they now deliver all or a number of their courses online, as a direct result of COVID-19 impacts.

In addition, ASQA's analysis of provider behaviour between 23 March and 31 May 2020 identified that 554 providers added 1401 qualifications and/or units of competency to their scope of registration. Of these, 71 were also CRICOS registered providers.

The emerging issues in relation to COVID-19 that were reported to ASQA over a similar period by way of complaints included that in relation to online delivery, providers were not amending course content or resources to suitably deliver online training. Similarly, concerns from learners were raised in relation to meeting their work placement/practical components. In some cases, this may have resulted in learners receiving inconsistent assessment guidelines and the use of different household resources to meet practical assessments, which is inconsistent with the assessment requirements of the units being completed.

ASQA continues to work closely with Australian, state and territory governments and the sector in responding to the unique challenges presented by COVID-19, and developed a [COVID-19 Risk Monitoring Strategy](#) to support providers in managing key risks.

ASQA's response has been multi-faceted, and included the development of extensive guidance to support providers in shifting to distance learning and online delivery, such as online resources and advice on managing COVID-19 training risks. These are available on a [dedicated page](#) on ASQA's website.

Some of the risks ASQA identified and provided relevant guidance on related to providers:

- not assessing the suitability of the training package or VET accredited course requirements for distance delivery
- not being able to deliver all components of a qualification through online or distance delivery—for example, work placements and workplace assessments

- not considering learner needs, including the ability, desire and capacity of students to undertake distance learning
- not verifying that the person the provider was enrolling, training and assessing is the same person who will be issued with a qualification or statement of attainment upon successful completion—a particular challenge for providers delivering distance training, including through online methods, where there are more opportunities for students to submit the work of others than there are in a ‘traditional’ classroom setting.

While ASQA is confident that the majority of risks can be mitigated, the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of education and training in helping business and individuals gain the skills or reskill in order to adapt to change. It has also highlighted some of the challenges the sector may continue to face in providing online education into the future.

Through the strategic review, ASQA will continue to monitor the impacts of the pandemic on providers, students and employers, and seek to identify and share information that will support continuous improvement in the quality of VET.

Purpose of the strategic review

The purpose of the strategic review is to:

- understand the opportunities and risks of online learning in the VET sector, to ensure our regulatory approaches are effective in responding to our changing environment
- ensure that the quality of Australian VET delivered online to domestic and international students remains at a high standard so that students, employers, the community and governments can have confidence in the integrity of national qualifications issued by training providers.

The strategic review seeks to determine:

- the extent to which providers have shifted to online modes of delivery in response to conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the nature and range of delivery modes providers are using
- the challenges and risks to the quality of VET encountered by providers, employers and students in the transition to online delivery
- the challenges, risks and opportunities for ASQA to effectively regulate online delivery and assessment, including ways to identify and manage challenges, with increased transparency
- stakeholder and industry perceptions, and student experiences, of online training delivery during the pandemic and as circumstances return to ‘COVID normal’
- changing industry expectations about the role of online learning in VET
- whether the shift to online learning during COVID-19 will change the way VET is delivered and assessed in the long-term
- best practice and future trends in online delivery of VET
- any regulatory barriers to sector innovation and growth in online delivery.

Scope of the strategic review

The following activities are included in the scope of the strategic review:

- research on risks and benefits associated with online and distance learning in the VET sector, including potential areas of innovation, and building an increased understanding of specific learning platforms and the range of technologies available for achieving learning outcomes
- consultation with stakeholders¹ to identify and analyse benefits, opportunities, risks and barriers associated with the transition to online and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, including:
 - understand the student experience of the transition to online learning and other impacts of the pandemic on training
 - the implications for quality training delivery, assessment and student engagement
 - any capability building of providers trainers and assessors for quality online learning
 - the extent to which providers intend to continue/extend their online and distance learning delivery.
- consideration of international education changes in online and distance learning, and any specific risks presented in this context
- internal consultation to identify the challenges, risks and opportunities for ASQA in effectively regulating online delivery and assessment, including identifying ways in which these challenges could be overcome, and the actions required to ensure ASQA is able to effectively regulate online learning without creating regulatory barriers to sector innovation and growth
- consideration of ASQA's approach across its regulatory functions, including education, monitoring and assessing performance, and ensuring the quality of online delivery
- development of education and guidance materials for providers released at key points during the strategic review ('feedback loops') to support sector insights and learning
- development of a final report, comprising findings, recommendations and actions that enable ASQA to promote and ensure the provision of quality online learning outcomes for the Australian VET sector.

¹ Includes providers, trainers and assessors, students and other key stakeholders

Input to the strategic review

ASQA will undertake public consultation, including a survey of all providers and direct consultation with key stakeholder groups and current and former students. The consultation process is designed to identify the benefits, opportunities and risks posed by the transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This process aims to identify areas where providers may still face challenges, including barriers to innovation, and where ASQA can provide further support as part of the strategic review process.

In addition, the strategic review will draw on the advice and experience of ASQA's Provider Roundtable and Stakeholder Liaison Group (SLG). ASQA has established an SLG subgroup to support the strategic review, comprising:

- Kerri Buttery, Director and Consultant, VETNexus Pty Ltd
- Julie Healy, Director Vocational Education and RTO Manager, TAFE Queensland
- Serryn O'Regan, Executive Manager Governance and General Counsel, Evolve College Pty Ltd
- Karen Plowman, National RTO Compliance and Administration Manager, McDonald's Australia Ltd
- Christine Robertson, Executive General Manager, Education and Training, Open Colleges Pty Ltd
- Alex Schroder, Chief Executive Officer, VETPrep Australia Pty Ltd
- Andrew Shea, Chief Executive Officer, Builders Academy of Australia.

During the strategic review, ASQA will promote continuous improvement and take an innovative approach to engagement through the delivery of 'feedback loops'. These may take the form of webinars, panel discussions or other identified materials designed to provide and validate information back to the sector following a period of consultation. The feedback loops will be delivered at intervals over the duration of the strategic review, and are designed to:

- be responsive to the engagement and information considered and analysed at various points during the strategic review
- support providers in understanding and delivering quality online learning, including supporting provider self-assurance
- respond to challenges and/or information needs identified by providers or other stakeholders
- highlight best practice
- identify potential trends and/or future directions.

In terms of governance arrangements, the strategic review will engage with internal ASQA expertise through an Internal Reference Group chaired by ASQA General Manager, Engagement & Education.

As the strategic review progresses, consideration will be given to establishing an External Reference Group if required.

Timing

ASQA will commence stakeholder consultation from November 2020 and intends to deliver a final report by mid-2021.

Contact

Contact with the Strategic Review Team can be made through consultation@asqa.gov.au.