



Australian Government  
Australian Skills Quality Authority

ASQA

# Insights on self-assurance



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## **Long term vision for ASQA:**

Moving from input and compliance controls to  
a focus on self-assurance  
and excellence in training outcomes.



Rapid Review of the Australian Skills Quality Authority's  
Regulatory Practices and Processes, March 2020

# Our shift to a focus on self-assurance

- **ASQA works to the Australian Government principles for regulatory best practice**
  - continuous improvement and building trust
  - risk-based and data driven
  - collaboration and engagement
- **We have already started to shift our focus away from input and compliance to provider self-assurance through our:**
  - investment in engagement and education
  - regulatory practice and culture
    - focusing our assessment (audit) practice on clauses relating to self-assurance
    - introduction of the agreement to rectify and undertaking to remedy
    - revision of the annual declaration of compliance (in progress)
  - focus on risk
  - questions about self-assurance practice in our annual provider survey (closed 10 June 2022)
- **The work ORIMA have been undertaking in the co-design of a model for self-assurance is one part of our shift towards a focus on self-assurance.**

# Research Partnership: Australian Skills Quality Authority

## Developing a self-assurance model for the VET sector through co-design

15 June 2022

# Key findings from the literature review

The literature review found **strong support** for ASQA's self-assurance approach from both the **latest literature** and **better practice self-assurance models**

- Regulators outline set of 'principles' or 'standards' that providers assess against:
  - They don't prescribe how providers conduct their self-assurance
  - Importance of clearly outlining what 'good' looks like
- These 'elements' of models are framed on what the provider is doing (process-based)
- There is also strong evidence that a focus on achievement is required (outcomes-based)
- Framed as opportunity for providers to reflect on what they are doing well and where they can improve further
- A focus on excellence rather than compliance
  - However, some models (e.g. NZ) include compliance with minimum requirements as a focus area

## Common elements

- Service design and implementation linked to consumer / stakeholder needs
- Consumer and stakeholder engagement informs delivery and review
- Consumer support and inclusion
- Workforce capability, capacity and currency
- Effective governance, leadership and accountability
- Sector-specific risks areas (e.g. external recruiters)

# ASQA's definition of self-assurance

Most providers were **comfortable with ASQA's definition** and reported that it **aligned to their understanding** of self-assurance.



Self-assurance refers to how providers manage their operations to ensure a **focus on quality, continuous improvement** and ongoing compliance with the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 (the Standards).

Under a self-assurance model, quality and continuous improvement are **shared responsibilities** through the different roles of individual providers, sector leaders and the national regulator.

It involves providers having **systems in place to critically examine their performance against the Standards** and training outcomes, on an ongoing basis, to meet obligations and to identify ways to continuously improve outcomes.

# Benefits of self-assurance

Most providers were **supportive of self-assurance** and identified **benefits** for individual providers as well as the broader sector and stakeholders. While **a number of concerns** were also raised, many were **addressable** through the design and implementation stages.

## Benefits

### For individual providers:

- ✓ Increased **autonomy** and **flexibility**
- ✓ Enhanced **provider confidence**
- ✓ **Improved quality and performance**
- ✓ **Reduced regulatory burden**

### For the VET sector:

- ✓ Improved quality = better **reputation**
- ✓ Encouragement of **innovation**

### For students:

- ✓ Better **training outcomes** and experiences

### For employers/ industry

- ✓ More skilled workforce that is **responsive to industry needs**

### For ASQA:

- ✓ Improved **relationship** with providers

*"Self-assurance is about getting better and better"- Provider*

## Risks / concerns

### Sector and provider quality and reputational risks:

- ✗ Potential for poor performing **RTOs** to "slip through"
- ✗ Potential for "**fabrication**" of evidence
- ✗ Concerns that providers reporting own problems would be treated in a **punitive manner**
- ✗ **Reduced independent feedback** to providers:
  - ✗ Loss of learning opportunities
  - ✗ Risks of non-compliance going unaddressed for longer periods

### Implementation and evidencing concerns:

- ✗ Unclear **expectations** / evidencing requirements
- ✗ Increased **regulatory burden**
- ✗ Lack of capability within **ASQA** to **process, interpret and respond** to evidence
- ✗ Concern about **inconsistencies** in ASQA's:
  - ✗ Interpretation of evidence
  - ✗ Treatment of providers

# Principles of the model

There was **continued agreement and support for the principles** developed in the second phase of consultation. It was also evident that the principles **provided important context** to providers about ASQA's self-assurance approach and **addressed potential concerns**.

## A model should be...

- ✓ **Flexible** to be appropriate for all providers regardless of size, type, operating context and self-assurance maturity
- ✓ **Aligned with RTO standards and supporting other requirements** including State / Territory where possible
- ✓ Focussed on **continuous improvement** rather than merely compliance
- ✓ Encouraging and supporting providers to **fully integrate self-assurance** into their business ('organic' to operations)
- ✓ Simple and **easy to understand** for providers
- ✓ Valuable to providers and linked to a **reduction in regulatory burden**
- ✓ Backed by **effective support**, guidance and education by ASQA
- ✓ Reinforced and **validated by other regulatory activities** including ASQA's performance assessments and risk analysis

## A model should avoid...

- ✗ Being overly **prescriptive**
- ✗ Encouraging providers to just **'tick the box'** / achieve the minimum requirements
- ✗ Causing self-assurance to become an **additional business process** for providers
- ✗ **Duplicating existing requirements** of providers

***"The principles provide a comprehensive list"***  
- Stakeholder

***"The principles look great. There's nothing missing"***  
- Provider



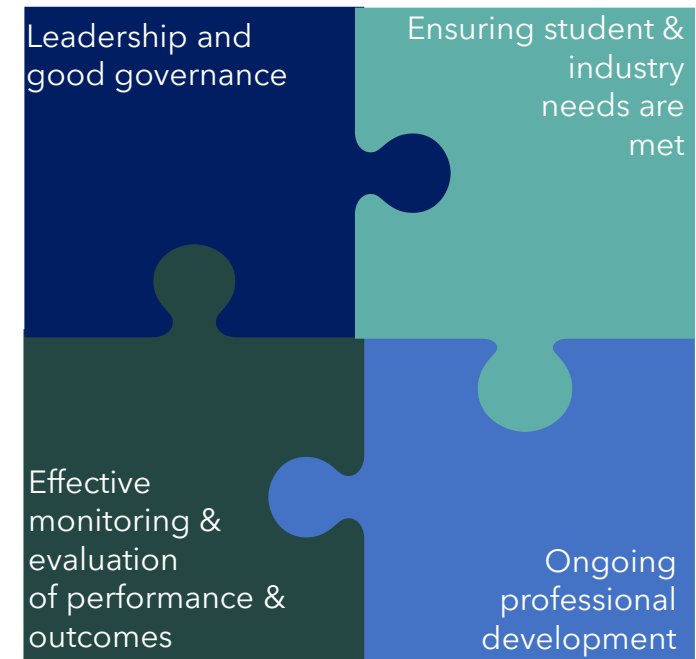
# Phase 1: Developing the model

Based on initial **consultations** and the **literature review**, potential elements for the self-assurance model were identified. These were then tested with the sector and were generally supported at a conceptual level for the model.

- ASQA Self-Assurance Consultation paper
- Literature review
- ASQA internal workshops
- Provider Roundtables
- SLC & SLG Meetings
- VET Regulators Forum
- SLG Sub-Group Workshops
- Interviews



## Phase 1 model



# Phase 2: Evolution of the model elements

Overall, there **was general support** for the model elements. However, feedback indicated that **further refinements** and improvements were needed. In particular, the addition of **quality training as a core outcome** was suggested. The model elements were **progressively refined** throughout the research. By the end of Phase 2 sector consultations there **was strong agreement and support for the elements** among stakeholders and providers.

## Phase 1



## Round 1 Phase 2

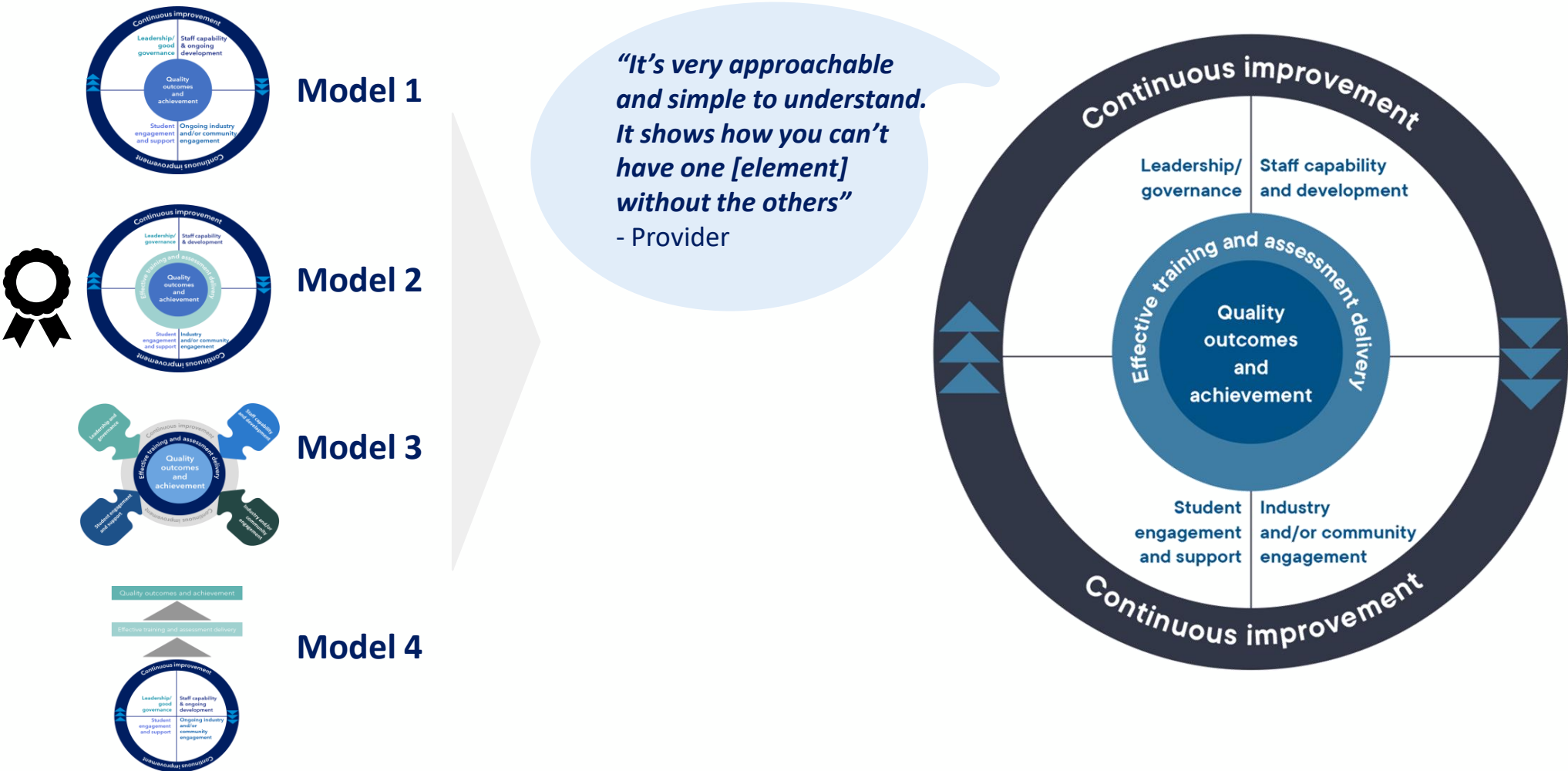


## Round 2 Phase 2



# Phase 3: Testing a variety of models

Phase three involved testing **four different models** in consultations. The models were **tested with focus groups** of small, medium and large providers, TAFEs and Universities, independent providers, regional providers, trainers and assessors, and industry clusters.



# Refined self assurance model descriptions

The **refined model overview** and **descriptions of the model outcome** and **elements** are presented in the following slides. A factsheet was developed to **present the model holistically**, with the model and descriptors in one document, as this was found to **enhance providers' understanding** and **minimise concerns** and **questions**.

## MODEL FOR SELF-ASSURANCE

This self-assurance model provides a framework for the systems and practices providers can undertake to monitor quality and compliance and **continuously improve** their performance against the Standards.

It outlines four foundational elements for self-assurance / continuous improvement activities– **leadership / governance; staff capability and development; student engagement and support; and industry and/or community engagement**.

These elements lead to **effective training and assessment delivery**, which supports **quality outcomes and achievement**.

The intention is to **build providers' capacity and desire to measure and improve their own outcomes** and identify and address emerging risks. Providers have the opportunity to **choose the mechanisms they use to self-assure** based on what suits their organisation.

# Refined self assurance model descriptions

## QUALITY OUTCOMES & ACHIEVEMENT

Improving learning and meeting student and stakeholder (industry and community) needs.

Key areas of focus include:

- student achievement and development;
- meeting stakeholders needs and purposes; and
- adapting training to changing stakeholder needs.

Providers are **encouraged to choose the self-assurance activities** that **best suit their organization**, in order to **assure themselves** they are meeting their **obligations under the Standards**, and continuously improving.

These may include monitoring and addressing:

- student enrolment and completion rates;
- increase in student skills and capabilities;
- satisfaction ratings from students, trainers and assessors, and employers/workplaces; and
- employment, study and/or community outcomes.

## EFFECTIVE TRAINING & ASSESSMENT DELIVERY

Enabling learners to meet training requirements and gain industry-relevant skills and knowledge.

Self-assurance **may include** practices to ensure:

- training, resources and courses reflect training product requirements and industry needs;
- assessment is fair, reliable, consistent and appropriate;
- learners receive appropriate and consistent certification where they are assessed as meeting requirements; and
- guidance/support is provided to help learners to transition into industry or further skill development.



# Refined self assurance model descriptions

## LEADERSHIP / GOVERNANCE

Established systems and processes that ensure that the self-assurance process is visible, operating effectively and leads to a focus on quality service delivery and continuous improvement.

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Measures to enhance the learning experiences and outcomes for students by focusing on how well students are supported and encouraged.



## STAFF CAPABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Practices to ensure training and assessment is provided by proficient trainers and assessors with currency and skills in their training and industry qualifications, knowledge and experience. Other RTO staff (including administrative and support staff) have appropriate opportunities to participate in professional development.

## INDUSTRY / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Established mechanisms to ensure engagement and alignment of training with industry and/or community.

Most providers were **generally confident that** their organisation would be able to move to a self-assurance based regulatory model as they felt **they already had self-assurance practices in place**. However, some **uncertainties and challenges** were identified.



- **Most providers** reported **currently undertaking self-assurance** practices (as required by Standards)
- However, some providers felt that **not all providers were effectively undertaking self-assurance**



- Many providers **concerned** that ASQA will have **specific requirements** of their self-assurance systems and practices, that they will be **unaware of or unable to meet**



**There was variance in maturity of self-assurance practices across the model elements**

## **Leadership / governance**

- Most providers were conducting **multiple activities** in relation to this element, although these activities varied

## **Staff capability and development**

- **Lower maturity** was identified in relation to this element, with most self-assurance activities focused on **compliance with the Standards** and currency of qualifications

## **Industry/ engagement**

- Most providers were undertaking activities in relation to this element, **however considerable challenges identified**, including difficulty in **documentation and ongoing engagement** in a meaningful way

## **Student engagement and support**

- **Moderate level of maturity**, an area of provider focus with most providers undertaking **multiple self-assurance activities**

# TAFE and University findings

Over Phases two and three, focus groups were conducted with **17 different TAFEs and Universities across Australia**. The TAFEs and Universities consulted **varied in their size, location, and their regionality**.

- Feedback from consultations with TAFEs and Universities consistent with broader RTO feedback
- TAFEs and Universities expressed greater confidence in ability to self-assure
- Self-assurance practices already in place
  - “Internal confidence”
- Very focused on student outcomes and valued engagement with their communities



“Users guide to the Standards is like a bible for us”

- *Participant in TAFEs and University focus group*

“Everything we do needs to contribute to outcomes and achievement”

- *Participant in TAFEs and University focus group*





# Key Learnings

- Most providers are **supportive of self-assurance** and are undertaking self-assurance practices and activities that are consistent with the model descriptions
- Many providers **concerned** that ASQA will have **specific requirements** of their self-assurance systems and practices, that they will be **unaware of or unable to meet**
- **Providers want** guidance on self-assurance practices aligned to the model elements, without being prescriptive – this will be an area of further refinement
- For many providers the focus remains on **assuring ASQA**, rather than **assuring themselves** that their RTO has systems in place to critically examine their performance against **the Standards**
- There continued to be **strong support amongst providers for ASQA's move to a more collaborative, capacity-building role**, and for ASQA to have a **lead role in educating the sector** about self assurance
- There was **strong support for changing the ADC to align with a self-assurance approach** and **increase the value of the process** for providers and ASQA

# For more information:



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