

Chapter 19

Quality Assurance in Australian Higher Education

Anthony Thomas Baker

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6772-9942>

University of Technology Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT

Australia has a robust system of quality assurance in higher education. There is a national regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), that oversees quality assurance in Australian higher education, through registering higher education providers under a number of categories and accrediting courses delivered by institutions that do not have self-accrediting authority. This agency is established under an Act of the Australian Parliament. As well as having a regulatory responsibility TEQSA also provides a great deal of information to providers of higher education as well as informing the public, students and prospective students about the higher education system in Australia. Higher education providers are expected to have good quality assurance arrangements within each registered institution. The intention of the quality assurance systems in place is to enhance and protect Australia's reputation for excellence, diversity and innovation in higher education.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Australian Higher Education System

The Australian higher education sector exists to educate domestic and international students and to carry out original research work. Higher education in Australia is soon to celebrate its 175th anniversary with the first university (University of Sydney) having been founded in 1850. The original aims of Australian universities were to train professionals locally and to achieve the more diffuse aim of creating an educated citizenry. In the second half of the 20th century and beyond, Australian public universities and the burgeoning private higher education sector have recruited and educated many international students to the extent that many institutions, including public universities, rely on international students to balance their account books. The education of international students in Australia is the third largest export behind the high-volume extractive industries: iron ore and coal. There are, of course, many broader benefits of educating international students in Australia, particularly those engaged in higher education, including

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-6915-9.ch019

giving international students, who may become influential persons in their home countries, some experience of Australia and Australians, as well as exposing Australian students and the broader Australian community to the influence of other cultures. Although current thinking attempts to monetise all activities, these less-tangible, and longer-term, benefits of international education should not be ignored.

The Australian higher education sector is very extensive including public and private universities, Australian branches of overseas universities, university colleges and institutes of higher education. In 2024, there are 43 registered universities, 8 university colleges and 157 institutes of higher education registered by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). The growth in the number of institutes of higher education has been marked with more than 50 new higher education providers being registered in that category over the four years 2020 to 2024. The official (Department of Education) data reports that 1.40 million students were enrolled in public universities in 2022, representing a decline from 2021 when 1.45 million students were enrolled. Though there are many more private providers of higher education than public universities only 148 000 students in total are enrolled in those institutions, so that sector is effectively an order of magnitude smaller in gross terms. Clearly, there is huge variation in the scale of the institutions: the public universities are large by world standards in terms of student enrolment with Monash University having over 82 000 students and the University of Sydney having over 77 000 students, whilst several of the small private providers have enrolments fewer than 100 students, with the largest private provider having an enrolment just under 7000 students, according to the 2022 data.

The different classification of higher education providers, to use the generic term for all the institutions mentioned above, is explained in the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (HESF) which will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter. Higher education providers offer qualifications ranging from undergraduate awards such as associate degrees and bachelor degrees, to postgraduate awards such as graduate certificate, graduate diploma, masters degrees and doctoral degrees. The hierarchy of the various awards is explained in detail in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) that includes definitions of awards in the vocational education and training sector (VET) as well as the awards in higher education.

With such an extensive higher education system, with a large number of enrolled students with respect to the overall Australian population (recently assessed at 27 million people), it is critical that the sector does achieve the broad aims of educating students to a high standard and carrying out research work that is locally and internationally relevant. There are economic imperatives also in that many institutions, particularly those in the private sector, rely on fee income from international students for their continued existence. Quality Assurance (QA) is critical to the higher education sector and, as is argued here, quality begins at home, so to speak, as institutions must have their own robust QA systems in place, that align with national standards, and also have an ingrained culture of continuous improvement. The work of the national regulator, discussed in considerable detail below, should be straightforward if the institutions themselves are working to ensure that there is quality in all their academic operations.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Australia's higher education system prioritizes quality assurance to maintain its global reputation for excellence. Quality assurance as applied to higher education is the means of demonstrating that a desired level of quality of an academic activity has been attained or sustained, or is highly likely to be attained

20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/quality-assurance-in-australian-higher-education/365746

Related Content

Convergence of Quality Assurance Paths in Romanian Universities: Drafting a Set of Indicators

Valentina Mihaela Ghinea (2014). *Handbook of Research on Trends in European Higher Education Convergence* (pp. 413-434).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/convergence-of-quality-assurance-paths-in-romanian-universities/110104

Incorporating Physics Principles in General Biology to Promote Integrative Learning and Thinking

Tennille D. Presley, Noelle A. Harp, Latrise S. Holt, Destini Samueland Jill JoAnn Harp (2021). *International Journal of Innovative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (pp. 1-19).

www.irma-international.org/article/incorporating-physics-principles-in-general-biology-to-promote-integrative-learning-and-thinking/278401

An Extenics-Based Learning Performance Evaluation Scheme in Distance Learning

Ying-Chen Leeand Nobuyoshi Terashima (2014). *Advanced Research in Adult Learning and Professional Development: Tools, Trends, and Methodologies* (pp. 252-269).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/an-extenics-based-learning-performance-evaluation-scheme-in-distance-learning/99537

Integrating Service-Learning Pedagogy Into Community College Coursework: A Phenomenological Study

Timothy Leonardand Patrick J. Flink (2020). *International Journal of Innovative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (pp. 25-36).

www.irma-international.org/article/integrating-service-learning-pedagogy-into-community-college-coursework/245771

The Dynamic Nature of Philosophical Paradigms: Grasping Core Principles That Shape Our Perspectives

Gbenga Michael Adeyeyeand Olatope Oladunni Oladunni Daniyan (2025). *Enhancing Research for Academicians in Higher Education* (pp. 83-100).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-dynamic-nature-of-philosophical-paradigms/362874